

The

OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

THIS MONTH'S AMAZING STORIES carries a rather unusual collection of stories, we believe. They are unusual from the standpoint of variety. Not in quite a long time have we selected such a wide scope of subject matter...

LET'S TAKE the shortest story in the issue to begin with, to illustrate our point. It is "I Hardened You" by Rapoport Carlin. We think this is one of the most unusual stories we have ever published. It has an emotional rock and a jolt to our sensibility that leaves us a bit portentous for hours after we read the story. We've had a lot of talk about the atom war and its possible consequences, but we've had so little talk about what actually causes wars, atom or otherwise. Actually, it is man himself who causes the wars, and the trouble lies in his mind. In this story, this rather depressing truth is brought out in a shocking way. We advise you to skip this story if you can't take the truth—or if you think you're a pretty nice person. Maybe you just don't know yourself...

GUY ARCHETTE is next in line for our awards for being unusual. He has written a rather unique tale in "Twisted House" which has the sort of ending which is completely unexpected and completely satisfying. We know you'll like this one.

WHAT WOULD you do if you woke up to find an eight-legged dog in your bedroom, and there was absolutely no way in which he could have gotten into the house? The first problem, the eight-legged factor, would be important, but gradually the means of ingress would become dominant. In fact, it could get to be rather a bother. You'd be unable to shake it off. Your mind would begin to "take it hard". Well, that's what Robert Moore Williams does in his "Lord Of The Golden Men". Just an unusual opening situation which develops slowly to a rather dramatic punch. It'll scare the hair right off your head, especially if you've children of your own.

CHOWEN KENT takes one of the oldest ideas in amazing fiction, the death doll, and does things to it that result in a very unusual and spine-tingling story. Of course you'll know what the pitch is, be-

cause we just told you—but we don't think that's going to spoil the ending for you at all. You see, it's not the sort of ending you can predict, unless you are the greater than average reader. Your editor confesses he flunked out on it. Maybe you can out-do him!

NEXT WE come to what we think is the "piece-de-resistance" of this issue. It is a story by George Ginnman called "Superman, Incorporated". Another super-man story, you say, disappointingly? Well, get down off your high horse, and pitch into the reading of it, because you'll find that isn't just "another" super-man story. This one's an original idea, woven into a fastidiously based structure of science that will hold more than water. It takes in a lot of very recent unusual happenings too, such as the flying saucers (in which we admit the story isn't unusual), and we think you'll find much food for thought in the story.

S. M. TENNESSEAW brings us a space tale of mining on Venus which is quite clever, and ought to serve to round out the variety of science fiction here in this issue to a two. Nothing new about this one but it certainly is well-done. And it's very satisfying.

LASTLY, our first story in the issue, upon which the cover is based (either loosely). You won't find the girl on the cover galloping around on horseback, but you will find her in the story, and it might be that occasionally she did swing a sword in that manner. Anyway, we allowed the artist some artistic liberty in painting this one, and you won't mind if his truth ran away from him, so to speak—it's a good painting, and it serves as the frontispiece for a good story. This one's another from the word on, and that's the word—go. Go ahead and read the issue, and then drop us a line to let us know how you enjoyed it.

BUT, BEFORE we beam off, we'll inform you that we've been making some changes in prices, and if you find that there are certain differences in the magazine, such as no illustrations, it's only temporary, and we'll be back with all your favorite features next issue. Rap

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THE OBSERVATORY

By The Editor 3

SHADOW SUPERSTITIONS

By Ray Bennett 25

MOONSTONE MYSTERY

By Robert Merle 45

ANCIENT BARBERING CUSTOMS

By Francis Tate 67

GREEK RING LEGENDS

By Jane Lurie 87

DID YOU SEE IT?

By R. Dee 93

MIRACLES OF BLOOD

By Jeffery Stevens 93

AMAZING STORIES CROSSWORD PUZZLE

By Marion Boucher 98

MESSENGERS FROM ABOVE

By A. Merle 98

MANUFACTURED POWER

By B. E. Nelson 98

PORTABLE POWER

By Carter T. Wainwright 98

OVER THE WAPES

By Robert Carter 144

MESODONIC REPTILES

By Pete Bagg 145



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All STORIES Complete

DYNASTY OF THE DEVIL (Novel — 18,000) by Alexander Blade 4
Illustrated by W. G. Adams

The atom bomb is bad enough, but when it is coupled with the hands of Ghengis Khan . . .

THE OUTCAST (Short — 4,000) by S. M. Tannenbaum 34
Illustrated by Mapple Anderson

It was a home-up, but there was no way of proving it — until a rocket crashed in the jungle . . .

I MURDERED YOU (Short — 2,000) by Robert Garlin 48
Illustrated by Rod Roth

Her hopes for the future were inspiring, in spite of the fact that they must be killed . . .

TWISTED HOUSE (Short — 3,000) by Guy Archette 54
Illustrated by Ed Terry

Where did the old man keep his money? It must be in the house — but the house was "twisted".

LAND OF THE GOLDEN HORN (Short — 4,000) by Robert Moore Williams 70
Illustrated by Rod Roth

It was just a puppy — but it had eight legs, and it came straight out of a hellish nowhere . . .

DEATH'S DOUBLE (Short — 3,000) by Grever Kent 82
Illustrated by Julian S. Krupa

Oh come there's nothing to the old madon superstition of the "death doll". Or is there?

SUPERMEN, INCORPORATED (Novel — 28,000) by George Grauman 94
Illustrated by Julian S. Krupa

They were just too "gal", these supermen. They were so far advanced over Barthmen. So far . . .

Cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating a scene from "Dynasty Of The Devil"

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DYNASTY of the

By ALEXANDER BLADE

When Happy walked into Chinatown that night he could not have suspected that within a few hours he would hold the fate of the world in his hands, to say nothing of his life

THEY WERE all there, Mopey, Boile, Fisherty the cop, and Dippy. A warm feeling rose in Happy's breast. At the sight of him in the open door, they flocked over, grins on their faces, warm words of greeting on their lips; they were glad to see him!

They sat him down at one of the bare wooden tables and while the questions bubbled on their lips, he looked around. Nothing had changed.

"C'mon, hero," Dippy asked, his lean, narrow face alive with a mix-

ture of admiration and interest, "give us the low-down. What was it like?"

"Yeah, What was it like?" three voices echoed.

"Just a minute, boys," a fourth voice chimed in. "Let him wet his whistle, first. Makea talking easier."

Happy said, "Thanks," to Harry the waiter who had brought him a drink. Harry worked his lips, gave him an awkward smile and left. Happy savored the liquor in his mouth, rolling it around for a few seconds before swallowing it. Then he held up



DEVIL

The two Mongols spitted each other through and through, and grinned at each other as they did so.



a hand, palm up to keep them quiet.

"Before telling you all about my exploits on the battlefield, I want to make something clear," Happy began. "I wasn't a hero. In fact I was nothing. Just a Joe like the rest of the boys. So don't get any mistaken ideas that I stopped a tank with my bare hands. Or took a whole town all by myself."

"Aw, Happy!" Dippy's voice showed his disappointment.

"That's right, Dippy. I saw a lot but that's all."

Flaherty took the lead. His beet-red face had its usual film of fine perspiration which even in the coldest weather never left his features. "Happy's right, Dippy," he said. "Maybe he don't want to talk about it."

The three lums and the cop masked their feelings as best they could but Happy could read the disappointment in their eyes. He couldn't help it, though. It wasn't in him to boast nor did he want to go into any long-winded discussion about battle happenings. All that was in the unpleasant past. The war was over. And all he wanted was to resume the life he had left behind, four years ago.

"Now let's not look like you'd lost your collective grandmothers," he chided them. "Suppose you give me the dope on what's been going on here since I've been gone."

Boile' whiskey-thick voice gave him answer.

"Now what could be new on this flea-bitten street? The yocky's like during the old days when the boys drank smoke right from the can. The Mansion's still doin' business in the old place."

"Say!" Happy exclaimed. "Wonder if I can still get my old stall in that flea circus?"

Flaherty was disgusted. He pushed his uniform cap back on his head, displaying a fringe of red hair that was like a halo around his shiny bald dome.

"Aw now, Happy. You don't wanta go back to that joint."

"Yes I do, Flaherty. After all, you are the one who should know why I want to live there."

Flaherty scratched his shiny pate under the tilted cap.

"Yeah. Guess I do. But Happy that was so long ago. And things aren't the same any more. After all, when you came to the street you were no better than the rest: in fact you were worse. They had a reason fr what they were doin'. But you..."

"Sure," Dippy broke in. "What was it you called us in that book? Gee! What I could remember."

Happy could. "The rotting slats before the Mansion of Broken Dreams" was the phrase he had used. That's what he had been reminded of when he had first seen Dippy, Boile and the rest. Then he too had become a rotting slat. And had stood in front of the red-brick front of the Mansion watching the crowds pass, waiting empty-eyed and empty-hearted for just time to pass.

IT WAS MOPEY who brought to fruition a dream which Happy had thought long dead and buried. Mopey with his acid comments on the people who roamed the streets at the tail end of the Loop at night. Mopey with his cynical and certain reflections on the habits of those people. Happy had taken to jotting down the comments. The jottings became pages of life. And life drew itself out into a book, a book which drew rave notices from the reviewers and made Happy famous.

But Happy found that the Man-

sion was an integral part of his life. He moved to a larger more pretentious hotel, made the acquaintance of a higher level of society and in the end moved back to the Mansion, where men were real and said what they meant to say. Then came the war and Happy volunteered. Now he was back.

He looked down at his civilian attire. He had been discharged that morning at the reception center and had immediately bought a suit. It felt strange after four years of G. I. Already the strangeness was wearing off. All it needed was for Mopey to say something in that whining voice. The mental request was granted.

"Y'know Happy, when you said got me thinkin'. Take us f'r instance. All we want's a place to sleep a drink once in a while and jusr loaf the rest of the time. A' course we work when things get bad, and that eagle-beak in the Mansion wants to dough.

"So what happens? They's a lot o' blue-noses come to play Santa Claus or the shyeters around here gets the angle we ain't good f'r business. Or the cops gotta make a heap pinch. I don't mean Flaherty, here, hell! He ain't a cop even if he wears a uniform. But there's some who are. An' that's why I say that no matter how hard some folks try to get some pleasure outa just livin', it just don't stack up f'r them."

It was Dippy who broke up the meeting.

"Yoggetty, yoggetty. What're we arguin' about? Let's get back to cases. C'mon Happy, tell us where you were and what you did."

"Let's skip it for now, fellas," Happy said. "I've had a pretty tough day and not much sleep in the last three days, so what say, let's call it off?"

THE MANSION looked good to Happy. He trotted up the worn, imitation marble steps with quick steps. His eager eyes noted every new spot in the faded carpet and hole in the cane chairs. He even managed a grin for Fish-Face the clerk and manager.

"Hiya, Happy," the stooped, hollow-cheeked, long-nosed clerk said eagerly. "Glad to see you back. Heard that you're coming here to stay so I got your old hen crop fixed up."

"That's nice," Happy said, and suddenly found he was very weary. "Lemme have the key. Think I'll take a nap. Right now."

Bells, Mopey and Dippy waited until he had disappeared up the stairs before they spent what was on their minds.

"Well. What d'ya think?" Dippy asked.

"Dunno," Bells said. "Seems like the same Happy, then again seems like a different man. I wonder what he saw or did out there?"

"I'm sleepy," Mopey the silent one announced suddenly. It was the first thing he'd said all night. The other two burst into laughter at his words. But it broke up their discussion.

In the meantime Happy was having a difficult time falling off to sleep. Either the mattress was too hard or he wasn't used to sleeping in civilian beds after years of army barracks and open fields. At any rate, after turning and tossing for several hours, he decided to take a walk.

He turned left after leaving the hotel, thinking a stroll along the lake front might put him in a better mood for sleep. The Loop was quiet here and there a drunk rolled swayingly down the sidewalk. And now and then some late worker passed him bound for the subway. But these were the exceptions.

Beginning — 24th YEAR of THRILLING SCIENCE-FANTASY

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STORIES

JUNE 25c



DYNASTY OF THE DEVIL By Alexander Blade

He found a bench on the beachwalk off Congress Street and sprawled comfortably across its smooth, worn slats. The air coming in off the lake was cool, and the water, dark and waveless, held a few small yachts and cruisers prisoner on its bosom. Gradually peace came to Happy's soul and he realized that this eternal quiet was what he had been missing for those years.

And once again as it had done innumerable times in the past since he had left the offices of O. S. S., his mind reviewed the strange scenes and peoples he had known in the highly secret work he had been engaged in. The images crowded like a hurrying kaleidoscope over the retina of his mind. Ah Foo Te, the little priest in that Chinese village, whose withered, aged bent-twig of a body held more courage than any man he'd ever known. Boris Dmentov, the Bulgarian, a bearded giant sent by the Soviet as a collaborator. He knew thirty Manchurian dialects, and had the deepest knowledge of the Chinese mind. Janis Sayre, who on a certain night, had lost all belief in God. And on another night had found it again. Marcel Dupuy, the French baker, who had trespassed across Gestapo hunting grounds with the same unconcern as he had across the paternal French count's country estate in search of game. And had gone to his death in the Gestapo's torture chamber lamenting the fact that the village would miss his famous croissants made of crusts flour. The nuns in that little convent off the coast of France, where a half hundred fliers had found sanctuary from the Boche bloodhounds. All these and more marched in grand review and he wondered if ever he would see some of them again.

He sighed deeply and brought his

mind back to the present. Would he take up where he left off? Was that inner demand, that insatiable craving to put onto paper the thoughts and lives of others still within, like a hunger which could not be denied? He delved deep within himself but found no answer. Oddly enough he didn't care. For suddenly he found himself wanting the strangest thing, to see Janet Sayre again.

HER NARROW, wedge-shaped face with those strange wide, violet eyes, whose depths held such peace. And her thin, twisted lips, pale and bloodless had given him such strange ecstasy; he wanted to see her again! His blood leaped in his veins at the thought of her. And Ah Foo Te's parting words flashed like a beacon across his brain:

"My son," the withered old priest had said, "there are some who must ever seek. You are one of those. And like your compatriots, you will find the road does not run smooth. Or straight. The turnings are devious and sometimes tortuous. But always will you seek. I tell you this because I love you as my own son whom the infidel has taken. Now listen closely and forget not my words. For they shall light the path of darkness. Some day you will return to the land of your birth. Wherever you are and no matter what the time of your seeking, there are some who will show you the path."

"Find the sign of the temple's arch. And be not surprised at its humble station. For within are the mighty. And when you enter, ask for the one who lights the way! Be not afraid to ask. He will know you by the sign."

Happy had wanted to know what the sign was. But the old man had evaded the direct question.

Happy puzzled over the old man's

words. "The sign of the temple's arch." Where could that be? It must have a Chinese connotation. Ah Foo Te could have no knowledge of the outer world for he had spent all his life in that little Kwansing village. Happy snapped his fingers. There was only one place in all Chicago where those words could have a meaning. Chinatown. He looked at his wrist watch. And was surprised at the hour. Only two. He thought it was later. But so much the better. Chinatown kept late hours, he remembered.

He hailed a passing cab on State Street and took it to the heart of the small Chinese district. It wasn't till the cab went on its way that he came to the realization that he might be on a fruitless quest. These dark, dreary streets, empty of life and barren of light. On his corner was a large merchant of Chinese wares. Across the street, on the second floor of a three-story red-brick building was a chop house and even as he watched, a cab pulled up and discharged two men and a woman who made for the door leading to the upstairs. A street car clattered by. Here and there on the street lights filtered through curtained windows to prove that there were some who were still awake.

But of a temple's arch, there was no sign.

A small grin parted Happy's lips. There were perhaps five streets which bisected Wentworth Ave, the main thoroughfare of the district. It would take all night to walk them. Well, he'd made his bed and he was going to lie in it.

He was doubling back along the second street when he saw it. It was a sign stretched over the sidewalk and it proclaimed in handblocked letters that there were curies to be had within. A faintest gleam of light

showed through the painted windows. Happy stretched his head and made a face of disgust. Somehow, he felt that he had to get inside this place. And not on another night but then and there. He stepped within the shallow foyer and rapped sharply on the glass of the door. Nothing happened so he rapped once more, this time harder. And from within the mysterious confines there came the scraping sounds of slippers slipping across a wooden floor.

There was a hind spread across the glass of the door. Suddenly it flew up disclosing the small figure of a Chinese. The two men on either side of the door stared open-mouthed at each other for the space of several seconds, then the Chinese opened the door. Happy stepped within.

INSTANTLY he was greeted by an odor which was so familiar that for the barest instant he thought he was back in China. It was the all-pervading odor of joss stick, that incense-like material which is burned before certain altars in all Chinese temples. Yet from the first glance he had of the dim-lit interior, he knew it wasn't a temple.

Bric-a-brac was scattered in profusion. Every conceivable inch of space was taken over by a multitude of vases, antiques, Chinese statuary and the other impediments of a Clark Street junk house. In the meantime the Chinese who had given Happy entry had slipped to a far wall and had lifted higher the flame of an old-fashioned wall bracket. The light from the lamp gave a mellow glow to the somewhat bizarre interior.

Happy kept turning his glance one way, then another, peering over something that seemed to be familiar to him, yet strange.

"You wish something?" a piping

voice asked.

Happy gave his full attention to the Chinese who had approached him. He was small, like most Chinese, with a young-old face full of tiny wrinkles. The round, flat eyes looked up at him with an inscrutable searching glance.

"You wish something?" the voice reiterated. And Happy suddenly realized it wasn't a question.

Happy answered as a Chinese-high-born would have answered, ceremoniously, slowly, "I wish only to know the path. For it was told to me in Kwansing by a seer that to know the path's direction one must ask of the man who had trod it."

The demeanor of the man facing Happy changed. The long-fingered hands cradled each other within the sleeves of the old-fashioned gown. the shaven head under the skull cap bowed slightly and the piping voice took on a new depth:

"Aye. And the height of a hill by the length's of the sun's walk. And who was this ancient who told you to seek..." the words trailed off.

"The temple's arch," Happy said. "A man, holy and wise, named Ah Foo Te."

"Thrice-blessed is his soul. No longer is he in this world," came the startling words. "Today I added a new character in the temple's arch in his memory."

So old Ah Foo Te was dead. Happy had imagined that his death would be like the withering of some plant, and that in the end the old man had blown away like the prairie dust of his native state.

"I grieve his passing," Happy said. "You will do me the goodness to burn a stick in his memory?"

"Aye. But forgive me my bad manners. I leave my guest standing on the threshold of my mean establishment,

as though he were a beggar. Will you join me in a cup of tea?"

The Chinese led the way to the back of the shop which was concealed by a green baize curtain. He parted the curtain and Happy passed through. His eyes widened as he came through. For seated at a bare wooden table was the last man he'd ever expected to see, Boris Dimentov, the Bulgarian.

THE BULGARIAN'S eyes became round in wonder and the thick eyebrows tried to run off the low, broad forehead, as he stared speechless at Happy. But only for an instant. Then, with an alacrity that was amazing for someone of his bulk, he was around the corner of the table and his thick, hairy arms were wrapped around Happy in a back-breaking hug.

"Hoppy! Mine old friend! I am glad to see you, Hoppy!"

"And I, you, Boris," Happy said grinning broadly. "But what the hell..."

"Om I doing here?" Dimentov asked. "Eets a long story. Wong Kee eom tell you thees. What do say, Wong Kee? Thees man is an old friend of mine, and of Ah..."

"I know," the Chinese said. "Did you think that enemies are permitted the freedom of my quarters? But sit down, my friend. I have a desire to know what brought you here, tonight?"

Dimentov's teeth showed beneath the sweeping black moustache that adorned his lip. His eyes gleamed like those of a horse. He was still holding Happy in a tight embrace. At Wong's words, he released him and the three moved to the table.

"I don't know, Wong," Happy said frankly. "I couldn't sleep. So I took a walk. And while I was sitting in

the park my memory brought back days I knew with Ah Foo Te and Boris, here, and of the part we played together back in Kwansing."

Dmentov pounded the table with a fist broad as a ham.

"By tam! Those were the days! Member how we fooled that Yogan? Member how you took prectures of the Japanese headquarters from a Chinese wedding cart. Hal You was the bride. A bride wearing army shoes. Hal There was the days, eh, Happy?"

His Stentorian laughter boomed out, shaking the flimsy wooden walls. Wong Kee blinked his eyes several times, then moved to the rear of the room where a tiny tea pot hubbled in a voice like that of Wong's. The pot sat on a two-burner gas range. Happy grinned wryly as the familiar sound of Dmentov's laughter filled the room.

Wong served tiny rice cakes with the tea. Happy knew that etiquette forbade talk while the tea was being drunk, although he knew that both men were curious as to how he got here. Nor was he any the less curious as to what Dmentov was doing in a curio shop in a street off Wentworth Ave. in Chicago's Chinatown. The last he had seen of the giant Bulgarian, Boris was on his way to Harbin, at the close of the war.

Wong looked at Happy, bright-eyed in open curiosity when their ceremonial repast was done.

"How did you find this place?" he asked. "I did not seek the bright lights where an ordinary merchant would have found it more profitable."

HAPPY TOLD him what had happened. Wong nodded as though it was a commonplace thing. Boris' glasses shifted happily from one to the other as they talked.

"Fine, Fine," he broke in when his patience was exhausted. "Make no difference why Hoppy's here. What make difference's he is here. Me and him can make world go 'round. And by the bells of St. Sophia, we goin' do that."

"Boris," Happy said, "if only your exuberance made sense. But it never did before and I don't suppose I have a right to complain now. Wong suppose you give me the low-down on what's what?"

"Don't my Hoppy," Boris said happily as Wong began to talk.

"It concerns the atom," Wong said softly. "Yes, the atom," he continued, noting Happy's suddenly puzzled look. "The key to the world's future. Whoever holds that key holds infinite power. I could let Boris tell how he discovered what he did but that would take the rest of the night.

"As you said, you left Boris on the way to Harbin after the war's end. He never got there. As usual, Boris took the most indirect route, through Eastern Turkistan. And ran into a strange thing in an oasis on an ancient road."

"By tam, yes!" Boris broke in. "Was a caravan. Big crates, Japanese lettering. I talk to the head man and he says he bring them from sea coast and is going to someplace near city called, Yashtan. I don't think 'bout it no more till next morning. Then I see man come out of yurt and go to pony. I don't know but I think I see him someplace. I halfway to Harbin when I think where I see that man. By tam! He a German scientist, named, Shmeiser. And I see him years ago in Krasny. An' he with Japanese scientist. Then I 'member what they do. They go to Meng Chaiing to see 'bout minerals in mountain there."

Happy wrinkled his brow in concentration. Shmeiser! The name held a familiar ring. He snapped his fin-

gers. Of course. The famous German physician. And the puzzle began to lose its difficulty. So that was it.

"Wait, Boris. See if I'm straight on this. Years ago, Shroaiser went on an expedition with a Jap named Kirind. It had to do with the atom. Now these boys are back together again. And it's not for the general good, is that it?"

"Right," Wong said. "Inner Mongolia was China's long before the first Jap set foot in it. Most of the people are Chinese. They acted as porters on this little expedition. Do you know what happened to them? They were all killed when they reached their destination. That is, all but one. And he lived only to tell what happened."

"Did he say where they went to?" Happy asked sharply.

"No. He managed to fake death although he was terribly wounded. Then, somehow, he managed to get a pony and rode back to where he was found by some nomads. With his last breath, he got out these strange words, 'the sun dies in the east.'"

"The sun dies in the east?" Happy murmured. "Doesn't make sense. Did he say anything else?"

"No. Luckily, these nomads hated the Japs. So they reported the incident to guerrilla headquarters. And that's where Boris comes in. That part of China, as you remember, is Communist in tendency. Boris had stopped over at an army post. The news was flashed to him."

"By tani! I ready for hot time in Harbin. Vodka, woman wait for me there. But got to go back. I ask people all about this caravan. Find out lots crates go west; no come back. Only one place they can go. To mountains. But that like needle in haystack. So I go back to post and then to Harbin. Only no woman,

no vodka. Big excitement. I fly to Moscow in army plane."

Wong took up the tale. "Boris told the Foreign Commissar that it was all too apparent that the German was up to something. The wheels started turning then. The Commissar got in touch with the American consulate and that's why Boris is here."

HAPPY SHOOK his head dazedly. So that's why Boris was here. It was as clear as jitterbugging.

Boris grinned happily. His good old Hoppy was with him again. All was well. Now if the other man came they could start now.

"Yeah," Happy said. "That's why Boris is here. I got that. But why is Boris here?"

"Because of all the men in the Russian secret service, Boris has the widest knowledge of the Chinese mind and of the region you and he are going to operate in. Boris came here to get you. And by the oddest coincidence you saved us the trouble of finding you. You see, this is to be a joint enterprise, America, Russia and China. And of course you are the American agent."

"And where do you come in?" Happy asked.

"I am the Chinese representative. But I am not going along, however. One of our men out there has already received instructions of your arrival in the near future. Now we wait for Dr. Jonas Long."

Happy whistled. Jonas Long! The greatest authority on nuclear physics. The man who had charge of the Los Alamos experiment.

Suddenly a bell shrilled from the shop's interior.

"Eat's horn," Boris cried.

Happy looked with the deepest interest at the man Wong brought back with him. Long was a tall, slender

man of indeterminate shape made more so by the baggy, shaggy tweeds he affected. He had a lean face which was dominated by a huge, hooked nose and deep-set brooding eyes. He nodded moodily over the introductions. Abruptly, he turned to Boris and shot a question at him:

"You are Dementov?"

Boris nodded his head, affirmatively.

"Were you sure it was Shmeisler you saw?"

"I never forget a face," Boris said simply.

"I'd wondered what became of him," Jonas said. "When the British captured those men in that Norwegian experimental station, he wasn't there. So that's where he is. Back in those hills where he said there was the necessary ore."

After the abrupt questioning and soliloquy he stood in the center of the room in a brooding silence. Happy coughed to get his attention. When Jonas lifted his head he met Happy's eyes. He looked into them for a blank instant, then realized that this man was also a stranger.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said hesitantly.

"My name is Winters. Rodney Winters," Happy said. "I'm..."

"Oh. Oh, so you're Winters. General Dehman called me from Washington and said that the department was getting in touch with you. Glad to know you." All that in a staccato tone, as though he wanted to get it all out in a single breath.

Strange duck, Happy thought. But then all the scientists he had ever met were strange, if not in one way, then in another. He was sure Long was no exception. Once more Wong went to the little tea pot.

"Wong?" Boris called an aggrieved tone. "Is dot all, tea? No vodka?"

THE SMALLEST smile flickered over the smooth features of the Chinese.

"By the oddest coincidence," he said as he went over to a wall cabinet and parted the curtain. "I happen to have a bottle of your favorite drink here."

The fiery liquid coursed down Happy's throat. He gasped slightly as it hit seemingly in the pit of his stomach. But Boris took his drink as though it were water. As for Long, he was lost in thought and Happy had the idea that he never knew what it was he drank.

They sat through the rest of the night drinking. Long told them a great deal that was not known about the experiment with the atom. And of the great names in science who had participated in it. Which brought them back to the question of Shmeisler's purpose.

"I don't know what's behind it," Long said. "But I would assume that it had to do with the Japanese also if the crates bore Jap characters."

"It is a wild and mysterious country, that," Wong said. "Many are the strange things which have happened there. And the people, too, are strange. They believe that the dead live. That some day Chengis Khan will come out of those mountains and ride to conquer again."

"Not if Boris Dementov sees him, he wouldn't," Boris shouted.

A strange thought suddenly came to Happy.

"Boris," he asked, "what happened to that girl we rescued? That Janis Sayre?"

"She went back to Shanghai," Boris said.

"Sure, Boris?"

"Oh yes. In fact I was on the same boat."

Happy fell into an introspective

mood that had to do with the softness of a woman's lips and the tenderness of a woman's arms. Boris' shouting voice brought him back to the present.

"A last toast, gentlemen!" Boris had shouted.

Happy downed his drink in a single gulp as the rest were doing. The room suddenly swam in a lovely purple-colored haze and when he tried to rise, he couldn't quite make it. Dimly he heard Boris laugh. Then only blackness and blankness.

HAPPY KNEW he was on a plane the moment he opened his eyes. He was wedged close against the metal side by the huge Bulgarian. Boris was asleep, snoring loudly through parted lips. Across the aisle, Long also slept. Happy shook his head and was surprised to find it still on his shoulders. And more, that he didn't even have a hangover. Surprising stuff, vodka.

He looked down, past a wing and was surprised to see the blue water below him. He thought back on the previous night. And found he was still in the dark about several things. Why, for example, he was one of those chosen? Boris' qualifications were as obvious as those of Long. But Happy didn't think his work with OSS merited this assignment. Evidently Dehman thought so. At least that's what Long had said.

He looked away from the window and into the crinkled eyes of a captain of the air corps.

"Must have been a mighty tough night," the captain said. "That big Rooski logged both you guys out to the air port, threw you into the ship and said, 'Dese the boys. Lets go.'"

"I wondered how we got here," Happy said smiling. "But that's Boris all' right. Only he's a Bulgarian, not a Russian."

"Whatever he is, he's all man," the captain said.

"What's our destination, Captain?"

There was a suddenly speculative look in the airman's eyes. For a second he was going to ask what their mission was, but the training he had undergone through the war years, when missions like these were the common thing, closed his mind to the questions that came to it. Instead, he said:

"Sorry, sir. Only the pilot and navigator know that. But I can say we're in for a hell of a long trip."

Happy nodded and watched the small spare figure walk forward to the pilot's compartment. The gentle, rocking motion of the plane, the full throak of the powerful engines, made him sleepy. He dozed intermittently. In his waking moments he wondered at the reactions of his friends back in the Mansion when they found him gone. Perhaps they would think it was a ghost they had seen; certainly they'd find it difficult to offer any logical explanation for his disappearance.

A sudden series of explosive snorts heralded the awakening of Boris.

"By tan! Dese was like old times, eh Hoppy?" the Bulgar said.

"Too much so," Happy replied.

"Say, Boris. Just where are we bound for?"

"Moscow," Boris said.

Happy pursed his lips. The picture was beginning to unfold. Moscow, then a Russian plane eastward. Now more than ever he wanted to know why they'd chosen him.

"Dey ask me if I know someone. I say sure, Hoppy, my friend. Tan good man. So dey tell Consul get in touch quick General Dehman, I fly America, see Wong Koo, door open and who's der? Hoppy my pal. Good, no?"

"Good yea," Happy agreed. It was

almost like a fairy tale, the way Boris told it. All he had to do, it seemed, was to ask, and like the Aladdin character, his wish was granted.

Happy fell into an introspective mood. It had occurred to him suddenly that all this had come about through his not being able to sleep and having to take a walk. He shivered for some reason, then. It was as if a withered old beetle-skinned hand had brushed across his temples.

Boris, seeing that Happy was not in the mood for talk switched seats and sat with Long, awake also.

And once again, Happy slept.

HE WAS AWAKENED by the feeling of the plane's descent. There was that sinking at the pit of the stomach and he looked down past the wing again. Below was the largest airport he'd ever seen. Then the plane was skimming over the long stretch of concrete that was the port's apron. Slowly the huge plane twisted about until it was facing a two-storied gray-brick building. And the motors stilled.

From then on until they were airborne once again, this time in an immense Russian transport plane, things happened too quickly for Happy to get a full valuation of events. He knew that there were several Red army men who greeted them. And that they were quickly hustled into the other plane after Boris had conferred with one of the officers. Slowly the spires and thousand lights of Moscow faded from view.

On the first leg of their journey they had flown without escort. This time two Red planes flew with them, one on either side. Happy's eyes widened when he saw that they were jet-propelled. The Soviet government was going to make sure that nothing

happened to them.

From the corner of his eye Happy saw Boris regarding him stealthily. The instant Boris saw that he was observed, his glance shifted. Happy shoved his elbow deep into the huge man's side.

"All right, maren. Out with it. What's the big secret?"

A bland look of innocence spread over Boris' large features.

"Secret? Vot secret?"

"Look up. It's me, your friend *Happy* that you're trying to kid. The same guy who shared your blanket and ate in Kwansing. All this hush-hush business: Red army officers waiting for you; those planes out there. It all adds up to something and I want to know what."

The look of innocence gave way to one of pain. Assuming an injured tone Boris said:

"I couldn't help it, Hoppy. Vot I said before was true, about wanting you along."

"I know that, pal," Happy said. "But the real. Göve!"

"Politics, Hoppy. That's what it is. You see, Wong told you that it was in Turkestan. Actually, it's on the border between Turkestan and Inner Mongolia. Now that the Japs have nothing to say about it, the Chinese government and the Soviet want to settle the whole thing. The only thing is, in whose sphere of influence is it taking place? Something else I didn't tell Wong. There's something more than the business of crates going on there. Those natives are either crazy or I am. But they claim Ghenghis Khan is on the move again."

Boris always surprised Happy when he spoke this way. Usually, he sounded like Gregory Ratoff in one of his bad days. But every now and then, under stress, he proved he was a master of the King's English. Like now,

"Hold on, Boris," Happy said. "How do you mean Ghengis Khan is on the move?"

"Dot coolie the natives find told of something else. Of thousands of Mongol warriors he saw, all on horse-back. Dot's what's got everybody wondering."

"So why do we take Long with us?"

"I told you, because of Shmeiser. If it has to do with the storm, we want to know about it."

"Ahh nuts!" Happy granted. "No wonder I'm groggy. You're nuts! Wake me when we get there."

And Happy went back to sleep.

IT WAS A dun-colored plateau resting in the purple-misted mountains. Happy knew that beyond those misted heights were other table-lands surrounded by other mountains. And so it was through that waste that was called Inner Mongolia. It was early morning and the fog was just lifting from the ground to reveal some thirty wiry Mongolian ponies and their riders. There was a sharpness to the air that made him draw in his breath, hungrily.

Boris and Long came out of the officers' hut just then, each wearing a brace of pistols strapped to their thighs. The Colonel in charge of the post to which the plane had brought them waved a gauntleted hand. Then the two mounted their waiting horses and Happy spurred his to meet them.

"How long does junked think it'll take to get there?" he asked.

"Three days," Boris replied.

"THREE days!" Kirimi whispered. "I can hardly wait. But that is not long, after twenty years."

Shmeiser looked down at the alien Cer Jap and grunted a something. Shmeiser was a tall, thick-bodied man

in his early fifties. Steel-rimmed glasses bridged his bulbous, red-veined nose and magnified shiny, water-blue eyes.

"My government will be pleased to hear this," Kirimi went on. They have not forgotten Nagasaki. The other did not count. But our greatest warship was caught in Nagasaki."

"My government," Shmeiser said, using the English which was their common tongue, "has not forgotten it either."

"Your government?" Kirimi asked, his voice rising slightly.

It was a sore point between them, this business of government. Neither had one since the war's end. But they still spoke as though such were the case.

"At it again, eh, gentlemen," a third voice said.

The two turned and their looks of displeasure made the man approaching them break into laughter. The third was the most interesting of the three. Unlike the others, who were dressed as the natives, in the three layers of jackets and felt pants, he wore a smart pair of tailored riding breeches. Fine leathern boots were on his feet. And a wonderful jacket of double thick capskin protected his body from the mountain blasts.

Almost savagely, Shmeiser said, "Well. And if we are? So what?"

"Mr.—Smith—" there was a noticeable hesitation as Kirimi pronounced the name, "objects?"

"Only because you're fools," the man called Smith said affably. "The war is over. That one anyway. Now we have the means to provide for a new one. A better one," he amended. "So why quarrel over things that are done? Let us look to the future, the bright future."

The blue eyes of Shmeiser looked with minute inspection at the face of

the man before him. He had to admit that he had never seen a more handsome face. It was almost angelic in its expression. Yet on close inspection he saw the flaws that marred it. A certain weakness in the line of chin, a shiftness in the eyes, a slight tic of the lips. But on the whole, Smith was a handsome man.

"Yes," Shmeiser said in his guttural English, "the bright future. And we three to share it. It is strange, isn't it, that an Englishman, a German and a Jap should be partners?"

Kirimi laughed in high glee.

"Yes," he hissed nasally. "It is the wrong combination. Should be an Italian."

"I'm afraid the Italian is a man of action only in his words," Smith said. "Now take the fourth of our combine...."

"You mean Miss Sayre?" Shmeiser asked.

"What about Miss Sayre?" a cool, feminine voice asked.

THEY TURNED, as one, at the sound of her voice and watched the girl approach. And in each of their eyes was a different expression. Smith's held a cool look of amusement. Kirimi's narrowed suddenly and turned wetly bright. Shmeiser's disappeared behind heavy leaden lids. "Nothing, my dear," Smith said stepping forward and assisting her over several stones until she stood before them, a small narrow-built woman, with a wedge-shaped face and thin, tight lips. "The usual nationalist blather. They were about to come to blows, verbal ones of course, when I stepped in and poured oil on the troubled waters."

"I like that about you, Gerald," she said, lifting her arm from his grasp, yet doing it so easily, he found nothing wrong. "The way you pour your

oil. I don't suppose you forgot the match?"

"Touché," Smith said, giving voice to a hearty laugh.

"And what was that about a fourth? Are we to play bridge?" she continued.

"We were speaking about the fourth to our combine, Miss Sayre," Kirimi said.

"You mean the phantom Chinese gentleman?"

"Yes," Shmeiser said.

"Y'know," she said, "I rather like him. He's so direct. He has only one thing on his mind."

Smith grinned at her words. "Death," he said. "But then what is one to expect from one who has so recently returned from the dead?"

Janie shivered at the words. Quickly she changed the subject.

"What about your experiment, gentlemen?" she asked.

Kirimi's ever present grin appeared.

"A complete success," he said. "Within three days the foundry will turn out enough containers to blow the world up. But more important, the Khan will have assembled his men."

She looked toward the glowing fires belching from the foundry at the top of a nearby hill and wondered at the efficiency and minute detail that went into the stone building. Only a German and Japanese mind could have conceived of something so fantastic and carried it to completion.

"Come, Janie," Smith said. "Would you like to see our Chinese friend at his game?"

The moment the two disappeared over the brow of the overhang, the two who were left looked at each other. Shmeiser spat on the ground.

"Bandegade dog," he said.

"The time is not far off," Kirimi said, as though in reminder.

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DYNASTY OF THE DEVIL By Alexander Blade

"And what of the girl?" Shmeiser asked.

Kirimi shrugged his narrow shoulders. "There is no little to amuse one here," he said.

"Do you think they know of the atom bullets?" Shmeiser asked, dismissing what Kirimi said from his mind.

"The English fool has eyes only for her," Kirimi said, his eyes bright and wet, as if in envy.

"Don't take him lightly," Shmeiser warned. "I sometimes think he has the devil in him. Damn it! The man walked out of Berlin while all the police of the three nations were looking for him."

"And I out of Tokyo. There are harder things than that," Kirimi said. "But enough of him. Come to the laboratory."

AS HE AND the girl walked along, Smith said speculatively, "I wonder what those two are plotting now?"

"I beg your pardon," Janis said. Her mind had suddenly and inexplicably jumped to a man she had met, months before, a man called, Happy.

Smith looked sharply at her. But there was nothing to be seen in her face.

"Nothing of importance," he said. "Tell me. What do you think of our handiwork?"

She looked to where his hand had pointed and saw an immense stretch of level ground. It ended against the sharp escarpment of a huge cliff whose sheer sides rose for a thousand feet above the plateau. But it wasn't the ground that had attracted his attention. It was what was deployed upon it. The shudder of horror that shook her was sheer reflex, yet he knew the reason for it.

"The hordes of Ghengis Khan,"

he whispered. "And all their plotting is in vain without them."

She could never get over her first sight of them at their game. Smith had taken her to his shallow valley the first day she had come with him. And had told her what it was she was looking at. His words still came clearly to her mind.

"Once they conquered the world," he had said. "And soon they'll do it again."

She had stared in disbelief at what her eyes saw. Thousands upon thousands of warriors, clad in the ancient turbans and armor of Tartar Mongols, each man mounted on a pony, rode through what looked to be a series of intricate maneuvers. Then she looked more closely and saw that they were not playing. They were in earnest in their play. For they rode, one against the other, spear or sword at the ready and slashed with reckless shandon at each other. Only.... only.... She turned terrified eyes on Smith.

"They....they don't die," she had whispered.

For her horrified eyes had seen sword blades and spear poas entirely through the bodies of men and had watched them ride again.

"The dead can't die," Smith had said. And she recoiled from the look of bland amusement in his eyes.

He pointed to three men, also mounted, who were watching the rest from a small hillock.

"Would you like to meet him?" he asked.

"Who?"

"The great Khan."

She had said no, then. But she had met him later. And as they walked toward the battle action that was as silent as the mountains beyond the field, two men rode out to meet them.

Janis had thought she had lost all fear. That was until she had met the

Khan. Not even Smith or the other two inspired her with greater loathing. The Khan was easily recognizable. He rode a snow-white stallion. But it was not alone the horse, it was the rider that made a picture not to be forgotten.

EVEN ASTRIDE the magnificent bit of horseflesh, his shortness of stature and immense spread of shoulders was to be noticed. Those were the things to be seen at a distance. It was when he came close that she had seen that which had made her turn faint. It was his face with the massive features, the high cheekbones against which the eyes lost themselves in fleshy pockets. It was in his slit mouth which had lost the art of smiling, except when death was striking against those he was at war with. It was in the broad-nosed nose under which swept the long-curving raven-black hair, to fall in twin lines past the massive sweep of chin. But it was in his eyes that she found the most to fear. They were amber colored marbles which neither had life of their own nor reflected it from outside sources. She had never seen him blink. They stared at people, lifelessly, directly, unavoidable. And she knew that the German and the Jap feared them and him as much as she. Only Smith seemed to have no fear of the man.

The two clustered up and so great was the Khan's personality that were Smith to have asked her ten minutes later what the Khan's companion looked like, she would have been unable to tell.

The Tartar had a flat monotone of a voice. It held as little of life or color as his eyes.

"Greetings," he said, speaking in English. "They will be ready, soon. See. Already they are as proficient at

the charge as they were centuries ago, nor have their arms lost their strength. How long before you will have what you need?"

"Three days. Our friends have been laying the little pellets aside for their own use. They think...."

"Three days!" the Khan said softly. "Why so long?"

"The caravan must travel over mountain trails. We have no other means of transportation except horses. There isn't much we can do about it. And we must wait for the rifles. Our whole plan sits on them."

"I have waited so long, a little more time will not make revenge less sweet. Ah!" The Khan lifted stubby, dirty hands above his head. "To see the bright death come to those who wait it. What is sweeter? I shall build another pyramid of skulls in some city. Aye, I shall once more see the flames tear to the ground what my men have conquered. They will not be long in coming, those three days."

HAPPY said. "Three days, holy cats! Where are we bound for, India?"

The three were jogging side by side. Long had fallen into the use of silence. It was like a cloak under which he could escape the rest. Boris was, if possible, even more voluble than ever before.

"See the mountains," Boris said, pointing with his quirt. "One day to reach the one where we find the pass. Two days to get through."

"Then Shengri-La," Happy said.

"I think not wed be more like hell," Boris said softly.

Happy turned and surveyed their companions. There were thirty of them, Mongol cowboys, he called them. Dirty, stinking, dressed in layers of felt and hide, each with a bandolier of twin cartridge belts

strung across his chest and a rifle swung over his shoulder, they rode, slouched over their ponies. But he had no doubts of their fitness. Boris had told them of some of their accomplishments. It had been men like these who had harassed the Japs and made a torture of every waking and sleeping hour. They had fear of neither death or the devil. The Japs had used the wrong methods with them. Being nomads, they could not be compelled to do anything. That was the mistake the Japs had made, attempting force. Since it hadn't worked, the Japs tried their usual ways of torture and pillage. And had lost Inner Mongolia because of it.

"You know, Happy," Boris continued, "dat Junkul was the man who found dat coolie."

"Oh."

"Wing told you the coolie was wounded. Junkul told me something else. That the coolie was burned all over, too, like they had him over a fire before they shot him."

"I don't get it," Happy said.

"Remember the coolie's last words, 'the sun rise in the east?' Does it have meaning to you?"

"Not a darn bit."

"It didn't to me either," Boris said, lapsing into good English for a change. "Not until I coupled it with something else Junkul said. That those weren't the coolie's last words. He also said something about the 'devil riding again.' When we coupled the two then we got something out of it."

Happy whistled shrilly.

"Some figuring. I can't make any sense out of it," he confessed.

"But I did," Boris said. "On and off. I've lived in some Chinese province for thirty years. And ten of them were spent in this region. I've spent time with some of these Lama

monks, lived in the sinking villages, roamed the country on a pony, seen and heard many strange things. Like the old Lama telling me that the natives of these parts believe in only one devil, Ghengis Khan. And that someday he will return."

"Oh now, Boris," Happy said incredulously.

"I'm only telling of their beliefs. Remember, the Khan's burial place has never been found. And something else. I've seen a man raised from the dead. Actually. By this same Lama monk. And I wasn't hypnotized, either."

"Well, boy!" Happy exclaimed. "You're going a hell of a long way for your conclusions. The atom and the Khan. Uuh, uuh. I can't see it."

"Dat's the way it is, Happy," Boris said, relapsing into his old way with the other.

"If that's the way it is, then why are we going out with only thirty men?"

"If dat's the way it is," Boris said gently, "we will need a thousand times thirty. We are just the surveyors. Two of those riders, have the latest in walkie-talkies. Tomorrow, four squadrons of planes will arrive here. Ten of the planes will have atom bombs. If what we suppose is true, they are going to bomb hell out of that place."

THAT NIGHT they camped under the roof of the heavens. The sun had sunk beneath the rim of the encompassing mountains in a blaze of glory. The stars had appeared and at a signal from Junkul, the men had made camp. Happy, Boris and Long sat, relaxed after their supper of canned ration, and talked for a while. Then Long and Boris had dropped off to sleep. But Happy was still awake for some reason.

They had made camp in a small grove of stunted mountain trees. Junkul had posted sentries at the four points of the compass, each man at the very edge of the grove.

Happy rose, stretched and yawned, hesitating between following his companions or walking about for a few minutes, first. He decided on the walk. He passed the sentry, seated against the hole of a tree. The man didn't vouchsafe him a single glance, yet Happy was aware of his being seen. Just past the grove, the trail dipped downward toward a wide, arroyo-like depression. Happy, lost in thought, wandered down trail. Suddenly he was brought up short by strange sounds issuing toward him. By the faintness of the sounds and the number of voices, he knew they were still some way off and that there were numbers of mounted men. For he could distinguish the clapping of horses' hooves on the packed earth.

Swiftly, he turned and ran back to camp.

Boris grunted once, then awakened quickly under the push of Happy's palm.

"Something's coming up trail," Happy whispered.

It was amazing the speed with which Boris came erect, instantly awake.

"Lots men?" he asked.

"I think so, from the sounds I heard. And from the sounds of their horses."

Boris hesitated, then ran toward where Junkul lay. Happy, and Long, who had also awakened, following Boris laid a light hand on the Mongol's shoulder and Junkul opened his eyes. Boris barked something at him and he answered with similar barks. Junkul arose and called a something to the sleeping man. It was as if they were half asleep.

Instantly they were awake. Just then the sentry stationed at the spot where Happy had gone came running with the news of the stranger's arrival. The Mongols moved like ghosts, to the attack. For as Boris explained, while they ran, they had decided to hold up these strangers and see who and what they were.

An unclouded moon made the trail bright as daylight. Junkul had deployed his men across both sides of the narrow defile through which the strangers had to pass. Nor was it long that they waited. First there appeared around the bend of the trail, four men, each armed with carbines. They rode in the loose manner of all Mongols. It was easy to see that they suspected nothing. Junkul let them pass. In a few seconds the body of the caravan, for that was what it proved to be, came into sight. Twenty camels, each bearing two large crates rocked slowly by. On either side of the camels, rode another horseman, also armed. And last four more rode gear guard.

Junkul waited until the whole caravan was where it was easiest to be attacked, then shouted, "Ho!"

It was the signal the men on both sides had waited on. It was merciless and swift, the death that fell among the guards of the caravan. Not a single man escaped. Twenty-eight men fell almost as one from their saddles. Happy gulped a little at the sheer cold-bloodedness of the attack, but realized that it was necessary.

THE LAST gunshot had barely died in its echo, when the Mongols ran down to investigate what it was the caravan was bringing. Torch-es were lit. And by the light of these Boris pried the lid from one of the wooden cases.

"By the bells of St. Sophia," he

grunted at the sight of the rows of rifles neatly laid in the case. "So that's what they hold."

Happy had started to figure the moment he saw the rifles. "A hundred to the case," he said. "Forty cases, four thousand rifles. Doesn't seem like a lot. Unless there are others we haven't seen."

"Couldn't be many more that came through," Boris said. His forehead was creased in thought. "The first wasn't more than a month and a half ago. It takes two weeks overland, this way. Figure three loads. Twelve thousand rifles. Still not many."

"Well, Now that we've got them, what are we going to do with them?" Happy asked.

"Why, handing them to who wants them," Boris said slyly.

Happy nodded his head in admiration as Boris enlarged on his statement.

"We have thirty men. They expect twenty-eight. So we will provide the twenty-eight. And there will come a time when the twenty-eight will make room for two more, eh, Happy?"

Happy slapped Boris' broad shoulders. "Some little character, you are," he chuckled. "That's the ticket."

Junkul appeared at Boris' side. His oriental face bore a wide grin. He said something to Boris who asserted him and the grin spread all the way across his face. He laughed heartily and shouted something, bringing his followers around him. Then he talked for a few moments, after which there was much chattering among the others, but from their facial expressions they agreed with what he said.

The camels were tethered for the night, and the slain men's ponies were let loose. Then they went back to sleep. And this time Happy slept.

The next day they reached the pass

through which they had to go to reach that particular mountain in which they thought the mystery lay. Never had Happy seen such wilderness. The rock gorges of the Yang-Tze had frightened Happy the first time he had seen them, but nothing paralleled these masses of barren rock which lay tossed around as though by some mad convulsion of nature. The pass itself was tortuous and littered with rock fragments which bit deep into the unshod hooves of horse and camel alike. The tough mountain ponies didn't seem to mind but the camels screamed in pain. More it was narrow and the crests would bang against projections of serrated overhang. And always the pass led upward toward a clouded summit.

They were halfway to the top when the most terrific storm Happy had ever felt, struck, with a viciousness that was indescribable. Happy had noticed Junkul and several of the others looking toward the cloud-filled sky. He hadn't thought why they were doing it. But they had anticipated the storm and had tried to hurry the slow-moving camels to greater speed. To no avail.

Of a sudden, darkness fell the defile. A blinding swirl of snow descended on them cutting their visibility to a few feet. A screeching wind came with the snow whose power buffeted them as though it was a physical force. They moved, heads bent, their faces covered to the eyes, against the power of the elements. Not could they risk resting for more than a few moments at a time, so cold had it become.

The snow piled on the ground, concealing the sharp rocks. And the ponies and camels slipped alltheringly along the hidden trail. The men huddled low in the saddles, slapping

their skin-covered hands hard against their sides to give them a sort of warmth through action. The top seemed an endless eternity away. But at last they reached it. Only to find they had stepped from the frying pan into the fire. The storm was even more severe in the open. Happy rode his mount close to Boris, huddled like the rest, low in the saddle.

"How long," he screamed against the wind, "do you think this'll last?"

There was no spoken answer. Instead the man brought his head forward, as a signal that they must go on, storm or no storm. Time passed but Happy was not aware of it. He knew only that he was colder than he had ever been in his life. And that there was nothing else in life but wind and snow.

HE LIFTED his head once and through eyelids that were aches he saw the bulk of a mountain looming to his right. It was close at hand. And just when he thought there would never be an end to this maelstrom of fury, the wind died and the snow stopped. His heart was beating with a wildness that rivalled the storm which had just ended. He shivered and tried to part his eyelids but they were either frozen or they refused to obey the impulses of his muscles. He shook free his hands from the huge fur mittens and by dint of prying managed to get them open. Then he saw for the first time where they were.

It was the Dore model for his engraving of Hell. They were on the summit of a mountain. Below to their right a river wound through a narrow gorge. It was fully five thousand feet down. To their left new ranges lifted peaks into the clouds. Ahead, where Junkul was already leading the lead camel, the mountain slanted in

a series of terraces to a cloud-filled peak somewhere above. It was the desolate appearance of it all that somehow struck terror to Happy's soul.

Gritting his teeth, Happy pulled his pony's head toward the rest already following Junkul. He realized that there would be no rest that night for some reason. For if they were going to rest, they would have done so on the level of the plateau.

There was no trail visible to the eye but Junkul rode his pony as though he were following a path. It wound upward in a spiral. Happy, who was next to the last rider, saw the caravan string out for several hundred feet above him. Then the trail spiralled out of sight.

The shadows lengthened, night fell and a moon showed its rim above a distant peak. Happy nodded with each motion of the horse. He was numb with cold and fatigue. Yet he found some hidden strength to continue. Or perhaps it was his pride in race that made him continue. For he never heard a sound of complaint from any of the Mongols. And for the first time in his life he fell asleep while astride a horse.

"Happy. Happy."

Happy heard the sound of his name being called through the darkness of the great void he was in. Suddenly his pony came to a halt, jerking him erect in the saddle. Boris grunted down at him.

"What's so funny?" Happy asked.

"Like a baby, he sleeps, my Happy," Boris roared. "But come. We eat."

Happy blinked the sleep and tightness from his lids and saw that the men had dismounted and had set fires roaring. He tried to dismount and would have fallen had not Boris caught him in time.

"Like a baby I have to carry him," Boris said as he lifted Happy from

the pony and carried him to where Long was stretched full-length on the ground. Happy tottered and sank to the earth. Boris walked to his pony and took several cans of ration from the saddle bags. He gave one to Happy and took one for himself. Happy took a single bite and knew no more. Sleep had taken him so swiftly, he didn't know what had happened. Boris pulled a fur skin over the sleeping man, looked down at him with affection for a second, then lay down beside the other.

THE FIRST horseman reined sharply to the left, at the same time bringing a hand down across his mount's nostrils effectively preventing the horse from neighing.

"Chuntl," he called hoarsely.

Another rider appeared from out of the shoulder-high mist and rode close to the first.

"Yes!"

"They are close by. I heard a horse neigh and heard also the sounds of camels."

The one called Chuntl said, "Wait here, then. I'll call the rest."

He disappeared once more. In a few minutes he was back. Behind and beside him were many others, all dressed alike, and somehow, all looking alike. They wore tiny, round turbans, armor of hide, and each was armed with a curving sword and short bow. A quiver of arrows was fastened by a thong and brought around to the rear so that it would not interfere with them.

"From what direction did the sound come?"

The first man pointed in the direction. Chuntl nodded his head and spurred his horse forward. The rest followed in loose order. In a few moments they came to a halt. Chuntl, who had ridden ahead came back.

"I have seen them. They are in a hollow, near the trail. Thirty-three of them. Some of you around that way, some to the left, the rest follow me."

Some sixth sense woke Boris. Perhaps it was instinct, the last vestige that some ancient forebear had given him through the centuries; but suddenly he was awake, with a knowledge that there were strangers in their midst.

He twisted his head to one side and peered through narrowed lids at a strange scene. Many men were riding among them. Their horses' hooves were heavily bound against making noise, and he suddenly was aware of the roaring sound. It seemed to come from a long way off. Then he forgot the sound and watched the strangers. They came from three directions and all were mounted. His ears picked up as one of those near where he, Happy and Long lay, said something to another. They spoke in a dialect that was strange to his ears. For although he understood them, it was as if their speech was archaic.

"It is the caravan," the man said. "Shall we wake the lazy ones or let them sleep, forever?"

"Nay. Wake them. The friend of the Khan wants men in the foundry."

And the one who spoke first let out a loud yell, waking those who were asleep. Confusion reigned when they saw the strangers in their midst. At last Junkul came forward and asked the one who seemed to be the leader what he wanted.

"We have come to escort you to the place of the dead," the leader said.

Boris, stooping a little to make his height less, sidled up to Junkul and whispered, "Let him. In the dark they can't tell we're white."

"But we have not slept, having

come through a terrible storm," Junkul said.

"There will be enough sleep on other nights," the other said, "Come. Let us be on our way."

HAPPY took it all in. His right hand never strayed far from the pistol strapped to the holster at his thigh. He watched Boris, hawk-eyed to see any move the Bulgar might make and ready to interpret it in any way the other wanted. But when he saw Boris move off, he too relaxed and walked casually to the other. Long followed.

Boris spoke out of the side of his mouth, while he pretended to fasten the saddle girth:

"Be ready for anything," he warned. "I don't trust these."

"Who are they?" Happy asked as he also took hold of one of the straps.

"They are Tartars," Boris said. "And I don't mean the modern kind. Watch Junkul. He's scared stiff. He knows who they are."

"Do you think he'll funk out?"

"Not he. But some of his men might."

There was no time for more talk. Already Junkul and the leader of the Tartars rode off side by side. Happy and the other two mounted then and followed the rest.

The mist had fallen off to where it was only ankle high. Happy realized that they had slept for several hours for the first grey streaks showed above the mountain peaks, heralding the coming of dawn. Now the trail was more defined. In fact as they rode along, it became a broad highway well marked by the trail of many horses which had come that way. Now Happy, too, became aware of the roaring sound. And almost instantly placed it right. It was the sound of a waterfall. There was no

mistaking it, as far as he was concerned.

"Can't be," Boris said. "I've never heard of one in this vicinity."

"I'm sure of it," Happy said.

Happy was right. They saw it in the first light of the sun. It fell from an immense height and the sound of it shut off all talk. The trail led straight to it. It was full morning when he reached the lower falls. Here the water was a mere trickle. The Tartars set their horses into the stream and began riding up toward the head waters. In single file, the rest followed. Higher and higher they went until Happy thought they were going to end directly in the falls. The water grew more and more rough and the stream widened until it was a broad river and still the Tartars rode in the farthest edge of the water.

Then Happy noticed another thing. They were riding up a series of steps or terraces. Soon they were enveloped in the mist from the falls. It was bitter cold. Suddenly the lead man disappeared. And one by one so did the rest. When Happy arrived at the spot where they had gone he saw that the falls struck an immense overhang of rock some fifty feet above and the water was projected out over this obstruction to land a hundred feet further down. But because not all the water did that there was a certain amount falling over the lip of the rock. This water acted as a curtain through which the riders had disappeared. Happy followed the man in front of him, who happened to be Long.

He rode into a large cavern whose end was a point of light in the distance. But the road through the cavern was broad and the roof high. There was no difficulty either for horses, camels or men. The pinpoint

of light grew larger until it broadened into a vast circle. And Happy followed Long out into the plateau that was their destination.

He realized then why this place had never been known. For the cavern under the falls was evidently the only means of ingress or exit. Only a plane could have spotted it. But no plane ever flew that way. This stretch of mountain area, Boris had told him, held too many treacherous currents of air.

The ponies were strung out in a long line over the level table-land. Away to the right three buildings equisted in the morning sunlight. They were low, one-storied affairs made of some dark stone. Beyond them by the side of a low hill appeared to be a building housing a foundry of some sort. Happy had seen buildings like it in Nevada and Arizona. He couldn't see what lay beyond the hill.

AT THAT very moment Smith, Janis and Shmeiser were discussing the long-awaited caravan. Kirimi was in the laboratory.

"Tell me, Gerald," Janis was saying, "how do you plan on this conquest with the few thousands of men the Khan has?"

"There is a saying in the east, that the devil has more supporters than a saint. And the Khan is a devil. He doesn't need many men. Asia is a hot bed of superstition. When the news has gone out that Choughis Khan has come back from the dead and is leading Asia to her rightful heritage the faithful will flock to his standard. You'll see," Smith said quietly.

"I have always wondered how you managed to get him back from the dead," Shmeiser asked.

"How old do you think I am?" Smith asked.

Shmeiser looked at the unlined face

and said:

"Maybe thirty, maybe forty. Why?"

"I am three hundred and ten years old," Smith said. He smiled gently at the two who sat and regarded him as though he were mad. "That's right," he continued. "Who told you of me Shmeiser?"

"Hunterland, the fossil hunter."

"No. . . . Wait! He said that you were a friend of his father's. But that can't be. Hunterland was sixty when I talked to him, last."

"My name is not Smith," Smith said. "I had another name centuries ago. I died and was reborn. Many times. Now I have lived for three centuries. My last life was during the Khan's time. I have long awaited this moment. For I hate the world and want to destroy it, I will destroy myself. That is why I sought you and Kirimi out, after the war. The atom bomb showed me how I was going to succeed. There may be something of the supernatural in the way I brought the Khan back from the land of the dead. But he was evil. Only the evil can be brought back. The others I can't reach.

"I planned to kill you, my dear," he said, turning his attention to Janis. "I read your mind long ago, when we met on the boat and I told you of what I'd found in this land. Remember?"

Janis licked her lips. They were suddenly dry. Oh yes she remembered. This slim, smiling man who had talked to her on the crowded boat and had told her of the mineral discovery he'd made. He claimed to have found an ore better than uranium for the conversion of atom power.

"You thought to fool me. But I read your innermost thoughts. Did you and Kirimi know that this girl is a British agent?"

"You are mad, Smith," Shmeiser said. He was as pale as snow. "Kirimi told me all about her. He knew the commanding officer in the city in which she lived. Why every Jap officer in the city had...."

"Spare me the details," Smith said lifting a smooth hand. "I know that. But what neither of you knew was that when the war ended she volunteered in the British secret service. Remember, as I said before, the east has always been a hot-bed of rebellion. And Miss Sayre knew the eastern men. Naturally when I expounded my plan on the boat I did it deliberately because I wanted her to come with me. You see, although I am old, I am still young in some things and shall we say that youth must be served in these things. However a strange thing happened the first night we were alone in this house. I could not take her. It was as if she was enveloped in an aura of goodness beyond which I could not pass. So I knew then, that I had to make her evil, as evil perhaps as I am. Then I will possess her."

Shmeiser's voice held a tremor of fear, when he asked:

"And what of Kirimi and me?"

"You both have served your purpose. I needed you to develop an atom bomb from this mineral. That has been done. The rest is up to Khan. About these hollow pellets you and Kirimi have been so careful to hide, they won't do either one of you any good."

"I'm afraid that you're wrong about that," a voice said from the doorway.

It was Kirimi. He was standing in the open doorway. There was a pistol in his right hand. It was trained squarely at Smith's chest.

"Miss Sayre!" Kirimi said sharply. "Come over here, out of the line of fire."

Janis stepped around the table until she was standing beside the Jap. Suddenly, the Jap shifted the pistol in his hand until it was trained on Shmeiser, and pulled the trigger. There was a faint plopping sound and the German fell from his chair, a round purple hole in the center of his forehead.

"He was of no use to me anyway," Kirimi said, "And now you."

ONCE MORE there was the plopping sound. Smith, however, did not fall. Again and again Kirimi pulled the trigger until only a click answered the pull of his finger. And Smith only stood there and grinned at him.

"Didn't you know there isn't any way to kill me?" he said.

Kirimi's eyes bulged from their sockets as though they were going to fall out. Then, without a second's warning, he turned and ran through the door. Smith walked over until he stood beside Janis and watched the little drama that took place. Kirimi hadn't run more than twenty yards, when one of the Khan's warriors rode up. Smith said something to him and he spurred his pony after the Jap. It wasn't an even race, the horse winning hands down.

Janis screamed loudly and turned her head. For the horseman had bent low in the saddle and had swept down with his curved sword. Kirimi's head rolled in the dust of the field.

"There, there," Smith said putting his arm around her shoulders. "After all they both had to die."

Like a wildcat she turned on him and clawed at his face with her fingers. Once, twice her finger nails raked down on the smooth, pale skin. Smith laughed and pushed her away. And for the first time in her life, Janis had fainted. For her nails had left bloody streaks where they raked



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the flesh. And in the twinkling of an eye, the marks had disappeared.

Smith lifted her and placed her on the straw pallet in the corner. There was a bitter smile on his lips as he looked down at her for a minute, then turning quickly, he left the room.

The message the rider had delivered was to the effect that the caravan had finally arrived. Smith wanted to see if they had brought the rifles. He passed the headless corpse of Kirimi without a second glance.

HAPPY, BORIS Long and the rest of their party stayed in a tight group after their guides had left. There was something queer about these men. Happy couldn't quite make up his mind what it was about them, but he was sure there was something wrong. And if his eyes did not betray him, there was the evidence of Junkul's fearful look.

"C'mon," he said to Boris. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know," came Boris' worried answer. "Junkul thinks these men we've been with are ghosts. He said that he brushed against one of them during the ride and he felt no flesh."

"Well, this guy coming looks alive to me," Happy said, pointing to Smith.

They watched Smith come close to the leader of the Tartars and heard him ask something. Happy was amazed to see Boris turn pale.

"He speaks their tongue," Boris choked out. "And he asked if this Chuntl has spoken to the Khan about our coming."

Happy's stomach twisted sharply at the words. Into what sort of nightmare had they been led? The Khan had been dead for eight hundred years. Who were they talking about? He received an answer sooner than he thought he would.

Three men clattered up and reining their horses to a sharp stop, dismounted. The leader, a short, immensely broad-shouldered individual, with the cruelest face Happy had ever seen walked up to the white man in the English breeches and spoke a few words to him. The white man answered and the two walked away.

"It's not a dream, Hoppy. It's a nightmare. That was Ghengis Khan. And those two are up to some horrible deviltry. Because the other wanted to know how soon the Khan could be ready? Ready for what, Hoppy?"

Happy didn't know the answer to that one. And even if he had there was no time to give it. For Chuntl had ridden up to Junkul and had told him to follow. Happy and the two white men lowered their heads as they passed Smith and the Khan. They hadn't gone more than a few feet when they saw a girl run from the nearest house. She came toward them on flying feet. Happy saw the terror in her face as she passed him. And saw something else, the face of the woman he'd never expected to see again. Before he could prevent them, the words were out of his mouth.

"Janis. Janis Sayre."

She stopped short and turned slowly in his direction. She took one look and screamed:

"Happy! Quick! Run for your life!"

But it was too late. Happy's shout had turned the attention of the two men on him. Coincident with her warning, Smith shouted something to Chuntl.

Janis heard him, and although she didn't understand what he had said, she made a good guess.

"No, Gerald, not Don't. I'll give in."

"Watch out, Hoppy!" Boris yelled and Happy twisted about in his saddle. Six of the Tartar horsemen were

coming full tilt at them, their swords out and an expression of demonic fury on each of their faces. He drew both guns from their holsters and fired. He didn't know what happened to one shot but he saw the bullet strike smack in the center of one of the horsemen's forehead. Happy expected him to fall. But he came right on as nothing happened. Then Happy saw the impossible happen. The hole in the man's forehead closed up. The man was on him and all Happy could do about the approaching death was stare with unbelieving eyes. Then came shouted commands and the riders swept past without using the sharp blades.

The man in the breeches came running up.

"Drop you weapons!" he commanded.

Six pistols fell to the ground.

"Now get off those ponies."

They did as ordered.

"Which one of you is Happy?" he asked.

"I am," Happy replied. "Why?"

"Is this the one?" Smith demanded of Jania, who came up then.

She hesitated, then said, "Yes."

"What are you doing here?" Smith asked next.

"I heard there was a lady in distress," Happy said. "So I've come to rescue her."

Smith smiled and swung a clenched fist. It landed on Happy's mouth. Happy choked out a mouthful of blood.

"Why you do dat?" Boris asked softly.

"Because I want civil answers," Smith replied. "So perhaps you'd better give me one. Why are you here?"

"I think you know the answer," Boris replied. "The atom."

Smith's brow knit in thought. He would have found delight in torture, but there wasn't time. Already the

Khan was impatient to get started. Well, something would have to be done with these meddlers. The Mongols could be put to work in the foundry, but these . . . he knew. The laboratory. It was no longer needed. Nor were these interlopers.

"Here, bind these men. . . and the girl, too," he gave orders to several of the Khan's men.

"Now take them into the laboratory."

IT WAS dark within the windowless walls. They lay alongside each other, Happy next to Jania. Suddenly, Long began to talk in a low voice and for a while they thought he had gone mad.

"It's surprising the things one does for a living when one has to," he began. "Would you believe that a part of my youth was spent on the vaudeville stage. Really, it's true. I was poor and wanted an education badly. There were amateur shows in New York in those days. And many a time I appeared on the stage and made enough money to provide for a weeks board and food. Yes, and enough to pay for my education."

He laughed sharply.

"I used to admire Houdini. And my admiration for him almost changed my life. For it was a toss-up whether I should become a magician or a scientist. Science won. But while I was making my mind up I learned some of the trade secrets. And one of them was how to get out of any kind of rope bond. I think this one's easy."

And suddenly he was erect before them, the ropes with which he had been bound, slipping to the floor. In a moment the rest were free.

"What now?" Happy asked as he massaged Jania's wrists, then his own.

"Good thing they didn't search us," Boris said. "Remember those walkie-talkies I told you about? There's one

of them wrapped around my middle."

Happy looked on in amazement as Boris undressed to his shirt, and revealed the most compact radio sending set he'd ever seen.

"The latest," Boris boasted. "U. S. make. In two hours there will be fifty planes over here."

"And what about us?" Happy asked.

"All I can say, Happy, is that we'd better get the hell out of here before those planes get here."

Janis' hand twitched about his at Boris' words. He looked at her and suddenly knew why he had gone searching for the temple's arch. It was to find the road which led to her. But now that he's found her, what?

"Damn it!" he said savagely. "There must be some way out of here."

"Will you look at this?" Long's voice came to them from a work table against the far wall.

They crowded close to where he was standing. A queer looking machine stood upright on the table.

"Do you know what this is?" Long asked.

They shook their heads.

"It's a miniature cyclotron. An atom smasher. Those two wizards invented something no one has. I wonder why?"

And Janis spilled words as fast as she could get them out:

"I think I know the answer. Kirimi and Shmeiser were working on something that had to do with atom bullets. I think they succeeded because today Kirimi tried to take me with him. But they were both double-crossing each other and Smith, too. So there must be something here, we can use."

Happy found it. A small case nailed in the wall and looking as innocuous as a fishing case. Three rifles lay within it.

"Right in front of Smith's nose and he didn't see it," Janis said.

"But the ammunition?" Boris came to the main point.

"Probably in the rifles," Long suggested.

HE WAS right. The magazines were full. Ten tiny pellets lay in each magazine.

"I get it," Janis said. "They placed the rest where Smith could find them, but those they hid for the time when they intended to leave."

"What now?" Happy wanted to know. "Do we scam out of here? Or what?"

"First I notify headquarters," Boris said. "Because whether we get out or not, this place must be wiped from the face of the earth."

He sat the walkie-talkie in operation and spoke into it for several minutes then closed the circuit.

"I could not carry both sending and receiving," he said. "I only hope my message gets through."

"How long do you think it will take for those planes to get here?" Long asked.

"Three hours at the most," Boris replied.

"Then we won't have time to wait for darkness. We'll have to chance getting out of here now. How soon does this Smith intend leaving?"

"I don't know," Janis said. "But I think it's sometime today. He was only waiting the shipment of guns."

"H'm," Long granted. He thought for a few seconds, then said, "I still don't think we can wait Happy. Take a peek through the door and see what's going on."

"Why there's nobody out there at all," Happy announced.

They crowded around him and saw for themselves. Janis had the idea why the flat was deserted just then.

"Smith keeps the rifles in the foundry, where they've been making special fittings for the atom bullets. I suppose the men are getting their rifles there."

"How far do you think we are from that damned cavern?" Happy asked. His speech was becoming difficult to understand because his mouth had begun to swell from the blow Smith had given him. He had to repeat the question.

"Quarter mile," Boris hazarded. "Too far unless all the men are there. And then we'd have to go like the devil to make it."

"We've got to make it," Janis said. "Maybe we can hold them up there until the planes come."

Happy wanted to remind her that they also had atom bullets. But he realized what was in her mind.

"Hiss!" Boris whispered from the door where he was peering through he crack. "Smith is coming here."

Happy took a fast look and whispered, "Wait till he gets inside. It's dark here and before he can do anything we can nab him."

Smith came over the threshold, eyes narrowed against the sudden darkness. Then, feeling something was wrong started to wheel to get out and a pair of hands wound themselves around his throat and dragged him in. The door closed with a bang behind him.

"I'm afraid it won't do you any good," Smith said calmly when they had tied his arms and legs.

"I ought to bash your damned skull in," Happy said savagely.

Smith shrugged his shoulders. And smiled.

"Do you think you can get away with this, Smith?" Long asked. In a little while there will be fifty Russian bombers over here. Ten of them will have atom bombs. And I assure you that they will not ask your per-

mission for their release."

"And what good will that do?"

"I don't imagine there will be much left of your friends."

"The dead are already dead," Smith said. "All that can be destroyed are those huts and that foundry. The Khan's men are indestructible."

"That reminds me," Long said. "You have the rifles in that foundry?"

"Yes."

"Thank you," Long said. "Happy, are you a good shot?"

"I got my marksmen medal in basic."

"Then do us the honor of blowing that place to smithereens."

HAPPY laughed aloud as he got the full significance of Long's request. The rifles were there. Maybe, as Smith said, the dead can't die. But their weapons could be made useless. Taking up one of the rifles, he stepped outside. There was no sound from his feet.

"Like hitting a barn door with a slingshot," he said to himself as he took aim. A huge cloud of dust arose from where the foundry had once stood mushrooming out in fantastic shapes as it seemed to rise into the very heavens.

Happy felt a pair of arms lift him erect. He looked dazedly into the eyes of Boris. Beside him were Long and Janis.

"Well done," Happy," Long said. "Now I think we'd better leave here."

They ran at full speed for the dark maw of the cavern. They almost made it when they saw hundreds of horsemen riding their way.

"Looks like this Smith chap was right," Long gasped as they ran.

Suddenly Boris whirled, dropped to his knees and let go with a shot. It must have struck one of them for

there was another vast explosion. They waited for the smoke to clear away. They gasped in amazement when it did, for they saw that even atomic energy had no effect on those devils from hell.

"Aim lower," Long cried. "Make a crater for them to get...."

But Boris had gotten his meaning before the last words were out of his mouth. His next shot hit the ground before the leading horseman.

Janis felt as though she had fallen into some vast void. She lifted her head and looked down at the ground. Blood was dribbling from her mouth. She rose wearily to her feet, swaying like a drunk when she came erect. Happy also had been thrown to the ground by the terrific explosion. He staggered over to her. Behind him, he heard Boris shout.

"Get to the cavern. I'll hold them off for a while."

"Go ahead," Happy said showing Janis. "I'll get that crazy man."

Long had beaten Happy to Boris, however. The Bulgar was dazed with shock and although it took all their strength, they managed to get him to his feet and moving toward the cavern. They hadn't gone far when he recovered and a struggle developed with him. He wanted to return and hold the Tartars back.

"No!" Long said. And as he spoke, he and Happy pulled Boris along with them. "We'll stand a better chance further back. The shock won't hit us so hard."

On the way, Happy picked up his rifle. But he noticed that the barrel was clogged with dirt. It was useless. And in the strain of excitement, Long had forgotten his. Happy turned to go back for it and saw it was too late. The first of the horsemen were coming from the pit created by Boris' shot.

THEY RAN all the way to the cave, where Janis was waiting them. Happy's brain had been working overtime while they were on the run. He thought he had the only solution to their problem.

"Boris," he said when they paused in the opening. "We've only got one chance. Give them all the shots but one. Then we run through the cave. And at the other end throw the last shell at the roof at this end."

"That's it!" Long shouted, his reserve breaking at last.

Boris counted under his breath, as he pulled the trigger. Eight shots, each placed so that they formed a semi-circle that almost enclosed the whole area. And before the first had landed, they had turned and started through the tunnelled-cave. They clung to each other for support against the shock of the explosions. At the most, they had only a few moments. They paused in a twinkling and the other end of the cave showed through a rainbow-tinted mist.

They watched as Boris turned and took careful aim, and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. Once more and again he pulled the trigger. But nothing came out except a click. The operating mechanism had failed when they needed it most. They looked at each other in helpless frustration. Janis burst into tears and fell to her knees. Happy went to her and began to comfort her. She was praying in broken accents to that God she had once denied and had found again.

"He won't let it happen, Happy," she said.

And in answer, there came a roar as of the concentrated fury of an outraged nature.

"The bombers," Boris said in a low voice. "They came just in time!"

Suddenly there was a rumbling sound and a cloud of dust belched from the cave, driving them back

with its choking fumes. Just in time, too. For with an unexpectedness that would have caught them flat-footed, the entrance to the cave narrowed magically, then closed altogether.

"Now," Long said as they started to the long trek back," Smith and Ghengis Khan can play at their games to their hearts content. In their private hell."

“**AND THIS,**" Happy said as he pushed the door open, "is the Chicago Coffee Shop, where most of the characters in my book hang out."

Janis looked about her, eyes big in wonder. Suddenly there was a shouting from a small group at the bar and three men ran to them.

"My best friends," Happy said, as

he introduced Bolla, Dippy and Mopey.

They were shy with Janis but she saw they were very much interested in her.

"Man," Bolla said. "If you ain't the character. You do the disappearing act better'n a magician. They had every cop in the city lookin' for you. Where did you go?"

Happy's arm tightened around the girl. Bolla saw it and a broad grin spread over his face.

"So that's why you wouldn't talk. You left the bride overnights. And you went back for her."

"That's it, Bolla. I went back, just for her."

THE END

SHADOW SUPERSTITIONS



By KAY BENNETT



P RIMITIVE man was veritably steeped in mystery. Even his shadow was a mystery to him. It was considered a part of the individual's personality. A person's shadow was not allowed to be reflected in a river for fear that a crocodile might snatch it and bring disaster to its owner. The shadow was associated with the soul or spirit of the person. The Zulus thought that at death the shadow of man would depart from the corpse and become an ancestral spirit. There is in folk-lore of Europe, stories of shadowless men. As an example, in classic literature it is said that the dead in Purgatory knew that Dante was alive when they saw that, unlike theirs, his figure cast a shadow on the ground.

Even the poleis was given a spiritual sig-

nificance by the Caribs. They thought that man's soul dwelt in the heart. They had one word to denote soul, life, and heart. The act of breathing in connection with the differentiation of the respiratory system toward the end of life, has been identified with the soul itself. Some Greenlanders gave two souls to man, namely his shadow and his breath. The Malays say that the soul of a dying man escapes through his nostrils.

Among some primitive folk the avoidance of personal animation with the pupil of the eye led to mystic dance. It was considered a sign of bewitchment when, approaching death, the customary image disappeared from the dream symbols of the sick person.





Blame dived and scratched wildly, but to no effect as she was held helplessly on the broad shoulder of her captor.

The OUTCAST

by S. M. TENNESHAW

Hell broke loose in the Venusian jungle when Jack Bradley found out he wasn't really an outcast — and set out to get his revenge!

HIS MACHETE strokes had weakened to the point where they were little more than futile swipes at the heavy Venusian foliage. His arms, working ceaselessly for days, seemed to hang from his shoulders like leaden weights. And his mind echoed the green, buzzing confusion of the jungle around him.

Two days. Two days that seemed like two years. Hack, and stumble. Hack, and stumble through the opening his machete had cleared. And always ahead there was the seemingly impenetrable wall of the jungle, pressing down upon him with its heat, a buzzing enemy of insects adding to his misery.

Wearily he slashed again and stumbled on. Somewhere ahead, he knew, lay Tellus Spaceport. Somewhere a hundred miles away beyond the mountain range he glimpsed at rare intervals at the horizon's end. He slashed his way toward that goal. For he knew his only chance lay in reaching it alive.

A rotting log jutted in his path and he sank down upon it wearily, wiping the sweat from his forehead. Almost mechanically his mind turned back to what he left behind there in the jungle. And the thought was not a pleasant one.

For years Earthmen had been attempting to colonize Venus and stretch forth the frontiers of Tellus beyond the Moon. And he knew they had succeeded to a degree. But every step gained had been won with an equal amount of blood. For the savages who inhabited Venus did not like the idea of Earthmen taking over the planet. But Earthmen doggedly fought on.

He thought of the colony he left behind him. And of the subsequent events that had happened almost too fast for him to grasp.

Old Beeden Farnsworth had struck a rich vein a month ago. And the Farnsworth colony boomed. Ore trains were bringing in record hauls of platinum. And the old man had been a wreath of smiles.

"Bradley," he had said one morning after Jack Bradley brought in the weekly ore train. "I've looked forward to this day for over fifty years. Used to be a time when every colony had to fight to bring the ore trains in. But it begins to look like the Venusians are finally learning they can't stop us."

But a few days later the old man had changed his tune. Men were disappearing. And when they found

there wasn't much left to recognize them. The answer was all too clear. The Venusians had attacked again. But even that wasn't the worst.

Bradley's ore train had been massacred. The Venusians had been drunk and armed with automatic rifles. Bradley's men hadn't a chance. It had been a miracle that he and a few scattered colonized native supply carriers had escaped with their lives. The old man had fairly flown into a rage.

"I might have known it!" he exploded. "Somebody's deliberately running guns and liquor to these savages! Some dirty outcast Earthman! If I ever lay my hands on him!"

SUSPICION fell for awhile on Jason Brail and his colony fifty miles west. But Brail was in no position to know the Farnsworth ore train schedule as he had to be ruled out.

Things kept getting worse. Every ore train Jack Bradley led was attacked. And blood ran free. The old man was nearing apoplexy.

And then one day things reached a climax.

Bradley had just reported the loss of his latest train to armed drunken savages, when Mandel Craig, assistant engineer to old Farnsworth, and a group of others strode into the old man's office.

Craig walked up to Bradley.

"Lost another train, eh, Bradley?"

Jack Bradley nodded wearily but noticed the strange gleam in Craig's eyes. Craig turned to the old man.

"For about a month now we've been losing men and shipments to armed savages. And in that time I've learned a few things." His eyes played on the tense features of Jack Bradley. The old man was leaning forward, listening. Craig continued.

"It seems mighty peculiar that the only ore trains to get attacked are

those led by Bradley—"

"What the hell are you driving at!" Bradley demanded, his face growing angrily perplexed.

"Just this," replied Craig. "It seemed strange to me that you should always come back from these attacks when most of the others didn't. And two nights ago I learned something to make my suspicions right." He paused and gazed over at Bradley, a hard smile pulling at the corners of his mouth. Then:

"Two nights ago I saw Bradley here steal out of the stockade and meet a group of Venusians. He was probably telling them of the ore shipment he was leading back in a day. Luckily these others," he motioned to the silent group of men standing behind him, "saw Bradley too. It seems pretty obvious now who's been selling us out!"

Bradley leaped forward.

"That's a lie!" he roared, and dove at Craig, his eyes flaming. But the others stepped in and held him back. Then the old man stepped forward. His eyes had grown hard.

"Is this true?" he demanded. "Did you see Bradley do that?"

They nodded affirmation. Farnsworth turned to Bradley.

"I never thought you'd do such a thing! But I've been wrong before."

"I tell you it's a lie! I never left my quarters that night!"

"You're forgetting, Bradley," Craig cut in, "that you were seen. You can't lie out of that!"

Old man Farnsworth faced Bradley.

"All along something told me that this was an inside job. But I didn't want to believe it. This only confirms my suspicions. If I had more proof of your damned outcast dealings with those savages I'd run you back to Telles Spaceport myself for trial.

But as it is I want you to clear out of here and if you ever show your face around this country again you'll be shot on sight! And I'll see to it that the word's spread along the line. You'll find out that gun-running outcasts aren't wanted on Venus!"

NOW AS Jack Bradley sat on the rotting log, brushing a swarm of noxious insects from his face, these thoughts made his mind numb. It had been a rotten frame-up, and he had had no way of proving it. But what was the reason behind it? Why had those men vowed they'd seen him talking to Venusians?

Angrily he swiped at the buzzing horde of insects that swarmed about him. It seemed to him the buzzing was getting louder every second.

Then suddenly he jumped to his feet. The buzzing was getting louder. But it wasn't the buzzing of insects. It was a heavy sputtering drone coming closer. Bradley strained his ears. The maccato drone grew louder. Then he recognized it; it was the sound of a rocket plane approaching!

Bradley searched the cloudy sky through a cleft in the jungle foliage and then he saw it. It was a small Hartford V47 rocket, and it was in trouble. Its blasts were silencing. He could see the ship knife toward the ground.

Bradley tensed, bracing himself for the crash. The jungle shook with it, and then silence.

He gripped his machete and slashed hurriedly forward toward the wreck.

Sweat was pouring down his face when he reached the small clearing in which the rocket had crashed. As he ran forward he saw someone stir amid the wreckage.

It was the figure of a girl.

Consternation twisted Bradley's face as he pulled her from the ship.

He poured not a cup of water from his canteen and held it to her lips. A small cut trickled blood down her temple and dyed the copper hair around it red. The water brought her around presently and she stared dazedly up at him.

He propped her up against the smashed hull of the rocket.

"Feel better now?" he asked.

The girl passed a hand feebly over her forehead and mechanically began to replace a number of coppery tresses that had become undone in the crash.

"Much better, thanks. I couldn't do a thing when those rockets quit!"

She got to her feet and surveyed the wreckage. "Not much left of it, is there?"

"It'll never fly again, if that's what you mean," he said.

Suddenly, as the situation began to register upon her, she stared about wildly.

"How far am I from Tellus Spaceport?"

Bradley thoughtfully replaced the cap on his canteen.

"About a hundred miles, in the middle of nowhere."

"Is it that bad?" she asked apprehensively.

"Well not quite. There's a colony about twenty miles from here: they get back to civilization pretty often."

"You mean the Farnsworth colony?" the girl asked excitedly.

"Yes," Bradley answered. "How did you know? You don't seem like a person who's been on Venus very long."

"I haven't. But that's where I was heading. You see, I'm Sharon Farnsworth."

Bradley started, nearly dropping the canteen. But the girl didn't seem to notice. She continued:

"I've always wanted to see what a colony is like, and when we received

word on Earth a few days ago that something was wrong up here, well, I hopped the first liner to Tellus Spaceport. There I chartered this ship," she gazed at the twisted remains of the rocket plane, "and here I am. It's a good thing I carry heavy personal insurance!"

She paused, noting the strange look on Bradley's face. "Is there anything wrong?"

Bradley forced a smile. "No, I can't say that there is." Then he added: "Right now."

The girl looked frowningly at him. "By the way, you haven't told me who you are!"

"Haven't I?" Bradley studied his hands, his face hardening. "The name's Bradley. John Bradley."

Her eyes were uncomprehending. "I said, the name's *Bradley*."

"I heard you the first time," she answered.

BRADLEY WAS at a loss for what to do or say. He had expected anything to happen when he told her his name. That is, anything but this. Could it be she didn't know?

"Did that message you received on Earth say what had happened up here?" he asked, pulling a cigarette from his pocket and lighting it.

The girl frowned. "No it didn't. Do you know what it's all about?"

Bradley pulled in thoughtfully on his cigarette. She had to find out sometime anyway. . . .

"I suppose I know as much as anyone," he said.

The girl waited expectantly. Bradley leaned against the smashed metal hull of the rocket plane and flicking away his cigarette, told her in blunt words:

Amazement spread over the girl's face as Bradley unfolded the events leading up to their meeting in the

jungle. And when he finished she remained silent for a few minutes. Then:

"You didn't do it—did you?"

"What difference does it make," Bradley snorted. "I'm branded an outcast, and as far as Venus is concerned, damned!"

"But there must be some way you can prove...."

"The only way I can prove anything is to get the real person behind this."

The girl looked steadily into his eyes. "Well?" she said.

"Well what?"

"Well, why are you running away? You won't find the person behind this in Tellus Spaceport!"

Bradley didn't answer. He couldn't. He felt the girl's steady gaze burn his face and his jaw hardened.

"I wasn't running away," he said slowly. "Although it might look like it. But I've got just enough supplies to reach Tellus Spaceport."

The girl brightened.

"If that's all you need, I can help. My rocket plane carried a full regulation supply of tablets."

It began to dawn on Bradley that the girl was urging him to return to the Farnsworth colony. And with the realization he suddenly knew something else. She believed him!

He moved away from the ship.

"Would you be willing to help me get to the bottom of this?" he asked. "Being on the inside you could keep an eye on things and let me know."

"Of course I will," she answered. Then a frown creased her forehead. "But how could I get in touch with you? If you are seen, Dad may carry out his threat."

Bradley rubbed his jaw thoughtfully.

"During the day I'm going to watch the Venusian camps for anything

funny, but at night I could get pretty close to the stockade uncom, and if you want me you can flash a light from the west wall and sneak out through the side entrance."

"Good!" she answered. "And if anybody on the inside is responsible, I'll find out!"

Bradley smiled and turned to the wrecked ship. "I'll need those supplies you spoke of," he said, rummaging in the crushed confines of the after compartment. Finally he drew out a small metal box. The girl meanwhile stood gazing around at the borders of the dense Venusian jungle.

"It certainly is beautiful from a scenic viewpoint," she said.

Bradley lifted his head and stared about him.

"What's so beautiful about it?"

The girl pointed. "All those white flowers. What are they? They look something like the Earth poppy, only these are much larger."

Bradley nodded. "They're practically the same thing. Venus is overrun with them. But when you have to cut your way through miles of them they sort of lose their novelty."

She smiled and gathered up her things from the ground where he had put them along with the supply case.

"I suppose we had better get started."

Bradley nodded and drew his machete from his belt. Somehow the thought of cutting his way through miles of jungle didn't seem half as difficult now as it had a few hours before.

HE LAY tense in the hedges that bordered the jungle around the Farnsworth colony stockade. The night was phosphorescently lit by radioactive deposits in the mountain ranges to the north. By the diffused

light he watched the close proximity of the colony. Three days had passed since he left Sharon Farnsworth. And in those three days he had found out many things. Foremost was the startling fact that the Venusians were being banded together for some mysterious purpose. Bradley had seen five hundred natives gathered in a single camp, and they were all armed with the latest automatic rifles.

And for three nights he had waited around the Farnsworth colony for the single flash signal from Sharon Farnsworth. But each night had passed without result.

Bradley shifted his position and for the hundredth time gazed across at the west wall of the stockade.

A ray of light suddenly sprang into being, followed by two more quick flashes. Bradley frowned amid his excitement. Why the three flashes?

And then he tensed. There was movement in the hedges to his right! Dimly he caught sight of a group of Venusians striding toward the outer fringes at the west wall.

And then he saw something else. A figure dropped from the East wall and began to circle into the bushes toward the west! But it was a figure that made Bradley's blood chill. *That figure was dressed exactly like him!*

He suddenly knew why the guards had sworn they saw him! Whoever was behind this was taking no chances. If there was to be any slip-up the blame would fall on the out-cast!

The figure disappeared into the bushes and a few minutes later reappeared opposite the west wall. Behind him the group of waiting Venusians stole out from their cover and moved in close to the Earthman. And then Bradley caught a glance at the face of the imposter.

It was Mandel Craig!

His heart pounding, Bradley watched. The figures did nothing but stay out in the open. And suddenly it became apparent to Bradley that they wanted to be seen from the stockade!

Almost as the thought formed in his mind a shout went up from the stockade. They had been seen. And anyone who was watching would think Bradley himself was outside with a group of Venusians!

As the shout went up Craig and the Venusians faded back into the jungle. Bradley watched them circle stealthily to the East and settle into the hedges around the East wall.

Bradley sunk lower into his retreat as a group of men stormed from the main entrance of the stockade, led by old man Farnsworth. Guns glistened in the radio-active night. Bradley dimly heard the old man's curses as he led his men into the bushes where Craig and the Venusians had been seen.

Bradley cursed softly to himself. Things were playing right into Craig's plans, whatever they were.

He half lifted himself from his hiding place to call out to the fading figures of Farnsworth and his men. But he fell back startled.

Someone else was stealing out of the stockade!

He strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of whoever it was and then his breath left his lungs in a puzzled sigh.

It was the girl—Sharon Farnsworth!

Unconsciously she was walking right into a trap. Bradley saw Craig turn suddenly and spot the girl. He heard a hoarse curse rip from his throat as he dove at her. The girl jumped backward and threw her hand to her mouth as if she were about to scream, but she was too late. Craig

caught her and stifled the sound before it was born. Then Bradley acted.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the Venusians stealing into the open gates of the stockade as he leapt forward. Dimly too he sensed movement behind him even as he sprang. But he didn't have time to turn. Something had crashed against the base of his brain and the world seemed to explode about him...

HE CAME to with the sensation of rolling against the waves of a tumultuous sea. He groaned slightly as his head cleared.

He was cradled on the shoulder of a huge Venusian. His hands hung down before him lashed at the wrists and his shirt sleeves hung open where the clasps had torn.

Bradley glanced quickly about him. The Venusian who carried him was bringing up the rear. Up front Craig was prodding forward a group of men with banded arms. Bradley barely suppressed a curse as he recognized the group Farnsworth had led into the jungle in search of Bradley and the Venusians! And beside them walked the girl.

And then Bradley saw something else. There was a dull gleam at the Venusian's waist beneath him. It was a short knife!

Slowly he eased the knife from its scabbard and turned the point upward, sliding it up into his sleeve. With one flat closed on the left it would remain unseen.

Minutes later they came to the Venusian camp. Bradley was prepared for what he saw.

Nearly five hundred Venusians were massed around blazing fires. Off to one side were stacked tiers of automatic rifles, and Bradley gasped as he saw a group of Venusians from the kidnapping party go over to the

guns and dump nearly fifty additional weapons on the pile. His heart sank as he realized these were the guns of the colony. Craig must have sent the natives in to steal them.

On the other side of the clearing were stacked the plundered remains of the Farnsworth ore trains. He recognized the ore crates and the small hydraulic ore presses. Next to these stood great open casks of liquor.

But the sight of this wasn't what brought a gasp to Bradley's lips. It was the sight of a short, thick-set man standing on the far side of the camp.

It was Jason Brail!

And Brail smiled cruelly as the party brought up.

"The whole family—outcast and all!"

Borden Farnsworth's face was livid as he faced Brail.

"So it was you who planned all this! You—"

"That seems quite obvious," Brail cut in drily. Then he motioned to Mandel Craig who stood off to one side smiling, still dressed as Bradley. "See that our guests are taken care of."

Bradley's jaw hardened. "What do you think you're going to do?"

"I don't think," Brail replied. "I know. There ain't room in this country for two colonies. From now on there'll be only one. Especially since the main vein of platinum seems to run directly into the Farnsworth outfit. By damn the rest of the colony will be taken care of, and then—I'll attend to the rest of you."

The girl shook her head angrily.

"The least you could have done was to leave them their guns! You know they won't have a chance when these savages pour down on them!"

"That is the general idea," Brail agreed.

"And after it's all over," Craig

supplied. "The outcast responsible will be handed over to the Tellos Spaceport Council."

Muscles bunched white on Jack Bradley's jaw and he almost drew the knife from his sleeve. But he caught himself in time. That could come later.

"It's easy to hide behind another man's name!" he said bitterly.

But Craig only continued to smile. And then Brail motioned to two Venusians. Bradley, the girl and old man Farnsworth were trundled into a low rambling hut. Inside, their feet were trussed. Brail and Craig looked in. Craig held a torch.

"You'll be comfortable in here for the time being," Brail smiled down on them.

THEN HE and Craig disappeared from the threshold and a huge Venusian parked in the entrance with his back slightly toward them. A rifle was slumped over one leg.

Beside Bradley, Borden Farnsworth squirmed in the darkness.

"I'm sorry, Bradley, about what's happened. Craig had me fooled..."

"Forget it," Bradley replied. "He had all of us fooled."

Somewhere in the darkness Bradley knew that the girl was crying.

Borden Farnsworth sighed heavily. "If only we could warn the colony—all those men!"

"A lot of good it would do," Bradley grunted. "Even if they were armed with cannon they couldn't stop these savages once they get that liquor out there inside them."

Bradley cursed frustratedly to himself. Dawn was only a few hours away and by that time the Venusians would be raving drunk and Brail and Craig would lead them down on the defenseless colony. Bradley closed

the ensuing picture from his mind. What he foresaw was not pretty. He had seen his ore trains massacred before his eyes by these same savages.

His hands gripped the short keen blade in the dark, his mind speeding quickly over the possibilities. He could cut their bonds and dispose of the guard at the door—but then what? There was no way he could stop hundreds of raving Venusians maddened by drink! Or was there.... Bradley's mind whipped back to a scene two days previous when he and the girl were standing in the jungle. For Bradley suddenly remembered something. Something that caused his pulses to leap.

He slashed at his bonds with the knife, watching the shadowed figure at the door out of the corner of his eyes as he did so. His wrists parted and he hacked the bonds from his legs. Beside him the girl and old Farnsworth sensed his movements and he heard their quick, indrawn breaths.

Then he slipped the knife beneath their bonds and slashed them. They were free.

"Quiet!" he whispered, and pressed the girl's hand reassuringly. Then he crept silently toward the door where the Venusian guard was intent in watching the preparations going on at the far side of the clearing. Bradley drew his arm back. The Venusian, sensing movement behind him, turned but too late. The cry that welled upon his lips died unborn. For the knife was suddenly buried deep in his throat.

With a rumbling rattle he slumped forward and Bradley felt warm blood flow down over his arm. Hastily he withdrew his knife and propped the dead Venusian up against the door. To any but a close scrutiny it would

seem he were still on guard.

He felt the girl and Borden Farnsworth edge up close beside him. He gripped the girl's hand in the dark.

"We've got one chance in a million of getting out of here," he said slowly. "And we've got an even smaller chance of stopping Brail and Craig. I've got a wild idea that's worth a chance. But I've got to chance it alone. You can help best by staying here under cover." He passed the Venusian's rifle to the elder Farnsworth.

Mingling with the dance shadows around the doorway, Bradley stole from the hut. For a moment he surveyed the surrounding gloom. Dimly he made out Brail and Craig distributing guns to the crowded Venusians on the far side of the clearing. The glint of steel shone even in the dull glow of the radio-active night.

Then Bradley saw what he was looking for. Softly he stole into the shadows and circled the clearing. He came up beside the piled remains of the Farnsworth ore train. Picking detection, Bradley slunk forward and pulled a small rolled machine into the shadows. Then he faded into the jungle....

BRAIL looked at his watch.

"One hour till dawn," he muttered.

Beside him Craig grunted. "Those savages are drunker than I've ever seen them. They've emptied every last cask!"

"So what?" Brail enquired. "Liquor's cheap enough. You better get Grakh. It's about time he rounded up these devils. It'll take an hour to reach Farnsworth's colony. And we can't take a chance on any of them getting away."

Craig nodded and turned into the

wildly milling savages. He searched their ranks until he found a towering Venusian, swaying drunkenly on his feet and clutching an automatic rifle in one taloned hand. Craig walked up to him and broke into the harsh Venusian tongue.

"Get your men together. Grakh. We're heading for the colony."

The Venusian stared stupidly at Craig and Craig noticed that the pupils of his eyes were much larger than usual.

"I said," Craig snapped, "get your outfit together, we're marching!"

But Grakh sat down.

Craig broke into a volley of curses. Around him Venusians were falling to the ground, voicing unintelligible phrases to themselves and with glassy stares in their eyes. Craig kicked the huge Venusian before him.

"What the devil's the matter with you!"

But Grakh's eyes stared sleepily up at him and he didn't move. Jason Brail came running up.

"What's happened?"

Craig ran his eyes over the clearing where hundreds of Venusians were slumping to the ground in trance-like stupor.

"I don't know!" he snapped. "There is something funny..."

And then his eyes hardened. Out of the jungle hurtled a figure. It was Jack Bradley, a knife in his hand. Craig stooped and grasped a rifle from the arms of a prone Venusian. But he never fired it.

Bradley's arm flashed back and the knife flew from his fingers. Craig gasped and fell backward, the gun falling from his hands. Spasmodically he clutched at the hilt protruding from his chest. Then he sank forward to the ground, a red froth welling from his lips.

Jason Brail dove on the gun Craig had dropped. But Bradley was upon him as his fingers touched the butt. A smashing fist drove Brail's head back and he fell to his knees. Bradley dove on him and snapped a hard right to his jaw. Brail sagged forward limply.

Behind him, Bradley heard a slight scraping sound. He turned and found himself facing the hard end of an automatic rifle. One of Brail's men had his finger around the trigger. There was a loud crack. But not from the gun facing Bradley. The man slumped forward clutching at his chest. And from behind, Bradley heard old man Farnsworth curse. He and Sharon came running up. The old man's gun was smoking.

BORDEN Farnsworth's face was a wreath of smiles. His hand went out and gripped Jack Bradley's hard. Beside him Sharon Farnsworth's eyes were highly lit.

Then a frown creased the old man's face.

"I can understand everything that's happened, Bradley, except how you liked these natives. They look like a plague struck them!"

He stared around the camp at the prone figures of the Venusians. Around him the rest of the men from the colony were taking possession of the guns.

"It was a wild hunch," Bradley explained. "but it worked. You see I

remembered that Venus is overrun with those white poppy flowers, similar to the Earth genus. Sharon remarked about them a few days ago and that was what gave me the idea. On Earth the juice of the poppy is used as a drug—opium. When I left the hut I circled the camp and stole one of the hydraulic ore presses and loaded it with those flowers. When the presses got through with it I simply mixed the juice in with the liquor casks while Brail and Craig were still handing out guns. After a few additions, that liquor was a poppy eater's paradise! And when the Venusians got enough of the stuff in them they passed out!"

Borden Farnsworth's face showed him astonishment. Then, as he suddenly turned to the trusted figure of Jason Brail, Farnsworth's voice cut like a knife.

"I made a mistake—and I admit it. There was an outcast—but it wasn't Bradley—it was you, Brail! And there won't be any mistake about that when I get you to Tellus Spaceport. I'm only sorry that you didn't get a good load of that stuff inside you like the natives did. —But you'll have as good a hangover at the end of a rope!"

Bradley let a smile tug at the corners of his mouth as his arm tightened about the girl.

"Speaking of hangovers," he said, "this is one thing the Venusians around here will never forget!"

MOONSTONE MYSTERY

ONE OF the most prized gems in India is the silvery-white moonstone. To its superstitious peoples have attributed many powers. Because the stone itself possesses a lustrous quality, a waning inner light, it is supposed in the East that a living spirit dwells within, a spirit potent for good.

The moonlike inner light changes on the surface as the light in which it is viewed

changes. This is due to a reflection caused by certain cleavage planes in foldings of the variety to which Moonstone belongs. Light gleams from beneath its surface in a band of soft sheen that fades almost imperceptibly into pearly shadow. There are no sharp definite edges to the highlight on the moonstone. This absence of sharp change between light and shadow is what gives the gem its serene, mysterious beauty.

Robert Morris

ANCIENT BARBERING CUSTOMS

By FRANCES YERXA

THE BARBER has always been an important craftsman in the East. The Egyptians cultivated their long hair the same as the Assyrians, and it was quite an art to curl and crisp and plait their long tresses in the fantastic devices then in use. The Egyptians, contrary to the supposing nations, wore no beards; in fact, they used a depilatory to remove the hair from their whole body. Joseph was careful to shave before going into the presence of Pharaoh. It would have been an insult to the king to appear before him unshaven or with the hair undressed. Some men took great pride in their long beards, encouraging the growth and carefully trimming them; but they never used dye, for a gray beard was esteemed as most honorable. Men would swear by their beards, or in cursing would say "May your beard be cut off," because this was never done willingly; only on occasion of calamity or as a sign of deep mourning. This practice was also made a means of punishment; so the Assyrians shaved off half the beards of David's messengers because they thought them spies. Some Oriental Jews shaved

their heads by injunction of their prophet Mohammed. The custom was a very ancient one and, in some cases, was practiced by the Israelites; but the Moslems left a tuft of hair on the crown so that the Angel of the Tomb might thereby carry them to paradise.

The first time a boy's head was shaved, usually at the age of three or four, it was conducted as a ceremony. Prayers from the Koran were said during the operation and a victim, usually a goat, was slain at the tomb of a saint and then a feast. Various duties were in the care of the barber. He was usually the dentist and the village doctor. His universal remedy consisted of bleeding, for they believed that all disease was in the blood. Barbers performed this bleeding operation with a lancet, as the Arabs usually, but sometimes on the temples, behind the ears or, if the case required it, on the feet. They also kept leeches for those who preferred them. The old sign of the barber shop, still in use in this country, a long white pole with a red band around it, had its origin in the Eastern barber's practice of blood letting.

GREEK RING LEGENDS

By JUNE LURIE

ISMENIAS of Thebes was chosen an emissary to a mighty Persian king. When he arrived at the castle he was told by the master of the ceremonies that the king would expect him to bow down before him. The Greeks did not go for this custom because it was a stain on their own dignity and also because it was an act of divine homage offered to a mortal instead of a god. But it was imperative that he accept this custom because the success of his mission depended on it. So as he approached the throne, he purposely dropped the ring he was wearing and so stopped to pick it up. In doing this he pleased everybody, for the Greeks in the court understood the ruse and their pride was eased, and the Persian monarch thought he had been paid due homage.

The iron ring was very popular in the days of the Romans. It was worn as a mark of honor. In Rome every freeman had the right to wear one. Also their horses wore them, but those who had committed a crime were deprived of this honor. Gold rings were not worn in Rome until the honor was granted to the ambassadors assigned to a foreign state, and then only

during their term of office. Afterward the custom spread to the senators and chief magistrates, who were permitted to wear the gold seal only in public, but continued to do so in private. After a while the right of granting the privilege of wearing the gold ring, which being exclusively to the emperor, was given to minor officials who proceeded to abuse the privilege. This annoyed Severus who was the Roman Emperor in 193-211 A. D., that he granted the privilege of wearing the gold ring to all the Roman soldiers. But the Roman army must have worn them surreptitiously in defiance of custom long before that time because after the battle of Cannae in 216 B. C., the victorious Hannibal ordered all the gold rings taken from the fingers of the Roman officers. It was reported that the rings filled three bushel baskets.

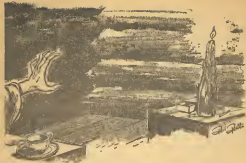
Another custom in Rome connected with rings was the key ring worn on a finger. This must have been rather awkward. Another custom was to deliver a ring to a person you thought might be about to die. This was a sign of great respect for the recipient.

THE END

I Murdered You



That night Maria entered the children's room
with a hidden knife . . .



By RUPPERT CARLIN

The atom war had come and gone, and a new kind of unhappiness faced mankind. The atom does strange things to the body — and the mind

SHE HAD been through it all. Her hair was snow white from radioactivity, and I suppose she was sterile...so many were. But you'd never know it, to look at her. She wore that snowy crown more proudly than any Alpine peak. Aside from her natural dignity and poise, she had a certain womanly majesty in her bearing.

She seldom laughed, but one never noticed that. She had a way of making you forget that people had slaughtered each other so thoroughly that our world was gone and that man as a race was only a dying fragment on a barren, sterile Earth.

We needed to forget, we needed a purpose, we needed to feel that life still had a reason and a meaning, had a goal to achieve. Somehow she was

our future—and she was alive!

Her name was Nadia...the rest I never heard. She did not talk about *before*, for it reminded people.

We were careful not to remind, for minds cracked easy, now.

She kept us aware that we were cultured human beings with duties toward each other; she organized us subtly; she insisting on a sort of formal tea-time atmosphere when we ate... She was a superb entertainer. Fluid expressions crossed her face, all emotions making each minute of the day an unforgettable and important experience. The children followed her, loved her...nay, worshipped her! Those poor kids! There was no civilization thinking up ways of entertaining, manufacturing toys, turning out Walt Disney movies.

She organized them, and they gave little plays and such things. If such women had only had power in the days of '48, we would never have had a war! But who ever asked women whether to go to war or not?

We had retreated to the Canadian wilderness when war struck. None too soon. Detroit was only a memory, an ugly scar on Earth's face.

One night she surprised me. She said: "Jim, it was the death cloud that really finished off organized warfare on earth, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Nadia, but why talk about that?"

"To-night I need to talk about it. I want to remember, and dream about the past, and what might have been...but never could be, for man were not good. No people can exist who do not love each other truly, respect each other infinitely, appreciate other people fully. Our people did not do that!"

I looked at the moonlight on her white hair, on her too-white cheeks, like translucent crystal, bloodless from the anemia of radioactivity.

I looked at the utter, relaxed, weary grace of her, and I said:

"Nadia, I love you! Why can't we..."

"No, Jim," she shook her head, "you are fertile, and our people need children. You know what my child would be, don't you?"

"We could find out, Nadia! Perhaps it would not be so."

She smiled and shook her head, pressed my hand lightly with her cool palm. I shivered, though it wasn't that cold. I couldn't help wanting her...none of us could. But she refused us all.

"No monsters out of me. I have enough to forget without such a remembrance to care for every day."

And I suppose she was right.

"YES," I returned to her question, "when they started the aerial turbines overhead, pushing air through radioscrives in quantity so that it blew down as great clouds of death...that was the end of the cities of men."

"How is it we have escaped, Jim? Doesn't that air still blow about and descend, and kill?"

"No, Nadia, it loses its radioactivity in a few months. The damage is over now. But it..." I stopped. Why go on when it was only repeating pain?

"Why did the enemy think they could beat a game as dreadfully as that?" she pursued. She had never discussed the war with me before.

"Nobody knows that, Nadia. Men are mad; *it is in the race*."

I stopped, for I knew I was killing her inner drive, the reason she had for working as she did with our group, a few score in all. I knew her reason could only be to hope that she was building a race that in the future would not be so murderous, so war-bent, as the old race had. I tried to cover up, for she had slumped as if struck. But she asked, in a strained, terribly hurt little voice:

"You mean you believe heredity will cause future wars no matter how the children are trained—no matter what kind of culture we develop?"

I could only keep quiet, because I really believed it.

"You are wrong, Jim Tracer. You are wrong!" she cried out, almost desperately.

"Of course I am wrong, dear Nadia. I have the old wrong-headed teaching in my own mind. Pay no attention to me!"

But she pursued me, as a person

about to die will ask the killer how does he mean to do the job.

"Explain your belief to me, Jim!"

I only shook my head. But she insisted and I faltered weakly on with it, like a man walking ahead in the dark, knowing there is a cliff and unable to stop walking. Like a nightmare....

"The theory is that radioactives cause mutations in mind cells, through the genes, so that every so many children will be the type to develop into killers. This has always been the case, and the factor is transmitted even when it does not become dominant. It is inevitable, according to eugenists."

"So we will always have our Hitlers, our Napoleons, our Stalins...and our massacre of the innocents will go on inevitably, age after age, race after race, son after son!...No, Jim, they breed dogs for certain traits, and the same could be done with men! The trait can be bred out of the race."

"Dogs are under an iron control. Men cannot be so controlled without losing everything such an effort plans to avoid."

"Even if we were the last people on the earth, and raised our children perfectly toward peace as a magnet points north...still the beast could come out in the next and the next generation...eventually he would get control, there would be war! That is your theory, Jim?"

"Yes, Nadia, and imperfect as are all theories. Do not think of it! Live your life and make your effort, and do not think of what I have tried not to say."

Not long after, pleading weariness, she left me.

I assumed she went to bed...with the thoughts I had given her. Curse a tongue that can't keep its secrets!

For days, she worried me. Then I forgot, for a while, what I had said to her.

YESTERDAY, swimming, the bigger kids were ducking one of the younger boys. He was a curly-headed, bright kid; one the women made a great fuss over...there being so few children. Accidentally, he drowned. Of course, it was an accident, I hope.

Midnight, that night, Nadia got up. I saw her walking by the river where the curly headed boy had drowned that day. I sensed she was too distraught to bother with me.

Our children lived together in a big log structure we had thrown up for the purpose. There were two women volunteered nightly to watch over them.

Sometime that night, Nadia entered the building, and with a kitchen knife killed the two women. Then she cut the throat of every child in our camp. Then she tried to kill herself, but the thrust did not strike the heart. She job of **KIRING** one's self.

I could not stop them, though I tried.

They burned her, over a slow fire. I did not know how difficult is the. It took all day. She shrieked and moaned until the sun went down and they crushed in her head.

Even with the flames snapping around her, and her poor weary mind quite gone with agony, she retained something indescribable. Something more than human. Something of mad pride and a conviction on her face that she alone of all these mad people, knew what she was doing. Up to the last insane agony, she remained somehow superior, above the "justice" they meted out to her.

I have lived in Hell since.

THE END

DID YOU SEE IT?

By R. Dee

Are you sure you saw what you saw? Or have you been fooling yourself right along without knowing it?

IN MOST every circle of friends, if the discussion gets around to things bordering the supernatural, you will find some person who will vow that at some time in their life they saw an apparition. The apparition—wraith—or ghost in question may have been a person near to them, or a person or thing entirely alien to their natural surroundings.

The big question to be asked of such an occurrence, is did the person actually see what he or she believes he saw? Or was it a mistaken fragment of the imagination more aptly called an hallucination?

The latter is more probably the case, inasmuch as science has proven time and again that the so-called apparition was in essence a misinterpretation of certain physical surroundings of the moment.

To illustrate this point we can well take the classic example of Sir Walter Scott, who beheld a vision of Byron in close proximity to Byron's death. For a time this vision of Scott's threatened to become one of the most famed of all "ghosts" until it was disproven by Sir Walter himself.

Knowing the strange peculiarities the eye is heir to, Scott closely analyzed the vision of Byron that he had seen at Abbotsford Hall. He found, much to his amazement, that a bundle of plaid and cloaks hanging in the hall were in reality the basis he had used in determining his "illusion" as an apparition. This rationalization squelched what might well have become one of the most famous of ghost stories. And it can be used as a measuring stick for most similar occurrences.

It has been found that most of these strange "visions" occur during sleeping hours. Usually the person experiencing the phenomena will awaken to find the "wraith" in the room, or awakening upon hearing some noise closely, will, upon a semi-sleepy investigation, come upon an apparition.

It is at such a time when the mind is wholly susceptible to the power of sugges-

tion. And what is more suggestive than a dark, or semi-dark room? Every goblin and demon of our childhood was a manifestation of darkness. And for the adult, while the goblin is not accepted anywhere, the fancy of the eye is captured by the strange way a distant light may play across a piece of furniture, or the way a piece of clothing may be hanging from a wall.

Naturally, when the lights are turned on, the room is seen to be in normal order, with no apparitions partaking of free rank. And if one stops to analyze what is in the room, especially at the spot where the apparition was supposed to have been situated, it can readily be found that some physical, inanimate object was in reality the source of the illusion. But while we can easily dispose of the ordinary apparition with scientific logic, there still remains the very unusual telepathic vision that has been growing in intensity these last few years. How many times have you heard of a person who predicted in almost fatalistic fashion an event of close family nature that was about to occur, or that had occurred in such recent fashion as to alternate direct communication through a physical sense as a solution? People see accidents occurring miles from the scene. And they report it with an accuracy that astounds.

We call it telepathy, or a sixth-sense. It is a field that is even now being investigated by competent scientific circles. The results thus far are inconclusive, pro and con. But one thing is granted by science that is not in the case of the ordinary apparition. In the case of sixth-sense it is believed to be possible, since the mind is something that we have only begun to touch upon. But in the case of the family "wraith" it would be well for the individual to adopt the proven measuring stick of science and turn on the lights to examine the room. That way one can see in actuality what was seen hallucinatively in the dark.

MIRACLES OF BLOOD

BY JEFFRY STEVENS

Blood means life — but at one time it meant death, if improperly transfused. The trick was to learn how . . .

FOR CENTURIES doctors dreamed of transferring blood from strong, healthy bodies into the veins of sick and dying patients. But their attempts were huge failures. In 1900, the Austrian scientist Karl Landsteiner came upon the clue that supplied one of the chief reasons why the doctors had failed. Human blood is classified into four distinct types. Blood of one type transfused into the veins of a person whose blood belongs to another type, may be fatal.

When doctors learned how to recognize blood of the desired type, armed transfusion was painful, tedious, and dangerous. And once blood is removed from the body, it coagulates in a few minutes.

The quest for an anticoagulate was begun in 1914 by Dr. Luis Agote of Argentina and on November 14, 1914, Dr. Agote was able to announce to the world that two parts of one percent of sodium citrate in human blood could not be kept more than a week. Bolderme's experiments on preserving and storing blood was made by Dr. Yudin of Moscow in 1929, and Yudin finally announced that blood could be stored for 35 days.

The first real blood bank was launched in 1937 at the Cook County Hospital of Chicago. Blood of all types was available instantly. A patient needing a transfusion received one; thereafter, friends or relatives donated sufficient blood to make up the deficit.

During the last few years the medical men have worked out a new solution which is the use of plasma, one of science's major miracles. After the red blood cells have been removed from the human blood, the yellow liquid portion which is left is the plasma which is dehydrated and frozen and stored away in plasma banks. Plasma pumped into the veins of a wounded person can mean the difference between life and death. Unlike whole blood, anybody's blood plasma can go into the body of anybody else. The first large-scale plasma project was launched by the American Red Cross in 1941, during the London blitz days.

Plasma fractionation has brought about new possibilities such as serum albumin, a new, compact blood substitute which does the job of plasma in treating wound shock with the advantage that only one fifth as much albumin is needed for transfusion as when whole plasma is used. Serum albumin has worked wonders for the wounded in the Pacific area.

Researchers next tackled the globulins—those elements in the blood which harbor the disease-fighting antibodies. Most doctors have stored up in their blood a measure of antibodies acquired during years of successful disease fighting. These antibodies are being isolated now and put to work. The so-called globulin vaccines are under way for other infectious diseases such as mumps, scarlet fever, diphtheria, and whooping cough.

Postbittins seem brighter. Amazing things are being accomplished with the plasma components all the time. A needed clotting component is thrombin and fibrinogen which can be concentrated in the white powder. Isotex in solution, it is known as fibrin. Scientists have been able with the aid of thrombin and fibrinogen, which is used in the most delicate surgery.

Fibrin substitutes for ruptured skin, the membrane that covers the brain, smooth, strong and elastic, it is immersed in water, to fabricate fibrin, foam, glass and plastic, and then easily fitted over the brain. Eventually the body builds up a permanent frame which replaces the blood fibrin film. foam. Where there is continuous bleeding from irreparable points too small to be stopped by clamps, the spongy fibrin foam is plastered on and the bleeding stops instantly.

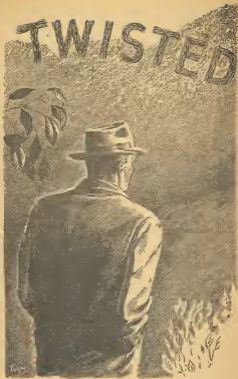
Fibrin, as a glue, has been a boon to skin grafting. Particular difficulty was encountered by doctors, when repairing the small angled regions of the body, such as the nose and the ears, where skin grafts must stretch.

Today, surgeons merely spray the injured area with thrombin, then dip the skin grafts into a fibrin solution and fit them to the injured area.

Red blood cells, which were formerly thrown away as useless, now are being transfused into anemic patients. The red cells are also being used to combat many diseases some of which are acute arthritis and tuberculosis.

But the red cell story doesn't stop with transfusion. Doctors at the Mayo Clinic have developed a red cell powder that will last indefinitely. The drying powder is used on conditions that do not show normal bleeding.

Blood may now become an all purpose-healer with the aid of continuing research of donated blood and with the close efforts of doctors and scientists.



Dexter examined the house . . . it was queer; strange fog veiled it . . .



THE HOUSE

by GUY ARCHETTE

The old man had plenty of money — the question was, how was he getting it? He never left the house, and no bank messenger ever visited it . . .

THE HOUSE was... queer. This was the third time Dexter had examined it from the hill-top vantage-point, and he felt its queerness more than ever.

A strange fog seemed to veil it. There was no slightest sign of fog anywhere else. And such of the house as was visible through the fog seemed to waver oddly, as outlines

waver when seen through heat waves.

In addition to this, the house was weirdly designed. Wings and bay-fronts jutted at the most unlikely spots, and towers and domes had been placed here and there without rhyme or reason. There was simply no... Dexter groped for the word... no symmetry about the house. There was just a grotesque appearance of un-

balance, an eerie shifting and twisting when one looked too long.

And Dexter had looked too long. He knew the longer he looked the less he would know about what had happened to Stella. For Stella had worked in that house—and she had disappeared.

She hadn't been the first, Dexter recalled. He had asked careful questions in Creston, and had received detailed and garrulous replies. The residents of the town had told him that several persons were suspected to have disappeared in the house. Some of Dexter's informants had claimed that the building was haunted, others that some sort of terrible spell or curse hung over it.

A couple of old men, however, had maintained that even before the house was built people had disappeared from the spot where it now stood. Perhaps, they had added, this was the reason why Martin Ballou, the owner of the house, had built it there in the first place. Martin Ballou, it seemed, was a strange man and had a reputation for doing strange things.

All this had been illuminating enough, but it hadn't satisfied Dexter's desire to know exactly what had happened to Stella. Little that was actually personal was involved. Stella—Dexter found himself thinking of her in the past tense—had been a heavy, regal-looking woman, with thick, platinum-white hair, which she wore arranged in an old-fashioned sort of style that was somehow in perfect keeping with her appearance. Like Dexter, she had possessed a cultured voice and manners, and had had no difficulty in passing herself off as a countess or a wealthy dowager. And like Dexter, she had been a highly successful confidence worker.

They had been partners in the bond

swindle. Stella, however, had escaped the police and taken refuge in Creston, where, learning that Martin Ballou was a wealthy old bachelor seeking a combination secretary and nurse, she had applied for the job. She had been a superb actress, and it was natural that she should have been accepted.

Dexter crushed out the cigarette beneath his foot and looked more intently at the house, shimmering and misty beyond the wall. His dark eyes were thoughtful and hard. Had Stella slipped up somehow?

It didn't seem possible. In her letters to him she had written that matters were progressing smoothly enough. They had been clever letters, their contents arranged in such a way as to contain hidden information. It was by this means that she had told him about Martin Ballou and the house.

To judge from those letters, Ballou always had a large amount of ready cash available. He spent this freely. He had expensive tastes, and nothing, it seemed, was too good. Yet he did not deal with a bank or keep accounts. Stella had gradually realized that Ballou kept his money hidden somewhere in the house. She had set herself the task of finding it, certain that a sizeable fortune lay at the end of her quest. And once she had found it, she had intended to dispose of old Ballou. He was simply to have disappeared, as so many others had previously disappeared.

But that evidently had been Stella's fate instead. Her letters had abruptly stopped, and according to what Dexter had learned in Creston, she had ceased to exist.

He shrugged. He was more concerned about the money than about Stella. The money was still intact, still waiting to be found. Dexter's

careful questions had assured him that old Ballou was still very much alive, and he had heard nothing to indicate that the man had been robbed.

Dexter moistened his lips in bleak yearning as he thought of the money. To a con man just out of prison, the money was the answer to every wish. Here was a job cased, planned, and begging to be pulled. He wouldn't need any working capital. He wouldn't have to waste any time lining up a sucker. All he had to do was get into Ballou's mysterious house.

And that was going to be easy. For he had learned in Creston—the thing that convinced him Stella had disappeared—that old Ballou was once again seeking a combination secretary and nurse.

Dexter intended to apply for the job. He had little doubt that he would be hired. Others were frightened away as soon as they heard the stories about the house in which Ballou lived, and the old man would be glad to accept anybody who came along.

* * *

STELLA had disappeared, but Dexter did not regard taking her place as a matter of courage alone. He was desperately in need of money and was willing to take almost any risk to obtain it—especially the sort of money Ballou reportedly had hidden. He intended to be more careful than Stella had been, to make certain that what had happened to her did not happen to him. If old Ballou had been able to survive the house this long, others could do the same.

Dexter straightened with abrupt purpose. He left the hill, descending the slope to the road level, and strode toward the stone wall. The gate

proved to be open. The sinister reputation of the house obviously served to keep trespassers from entering.

Slipping through the gate, Dexter glanced around him. From here a gravel driveway, choked with weeds, ran directly to the house. On both sides of the driveway were trees, more weeds, and rank, untended grass.

Presently Dexter started up the driveway, picking his path carefully among the weeds. His lips curled in disgust as he contemplated the punishment his shoes and trouser cuffs were taking.

The house towered up before him as he approached. He entered the fog that seemed to hang over the building and found that it was not a fog at all, but some sort of an illusion. It seemed to consist of sections, for all the world like a number of enormous cloudy glass bowls intersecting each other in haphazard fashion. As he strode from one section to the other, he experienced strange sensations—a feeling of heaviness, first, then a dizziness, then an effect of thickness, as though he pushed his way through a transparent jelly. Again, as he passed through still another section, he felt oddly light, felt as though he could float in the air with no difficulty at all.

Dexter couldn't quite decide whether to feel frightened or just ordinarily puzzled. At any rate, the phenomena didn't seem to be harmful. He tightened his lips, thinking of Ballou's hidden fortune, and continued on.

A low flight of stone steps led up to the door, which was broad and constructed of heavy oak planks. Dexter found the bell button and pressed it, wondering as he did so if it actually operated. The unpainted, dilapidated condition of the house

had given him doubts.

He waited. He mopped his face again, and then used the handkerchief to flick dust from his shoes and trouser cuffs. He straightened his tie and hat.

* * *

AFTER what seemed to Dexter a long time, the door slowly swung open. He found himself looking at a tall, bony-faced woman, who gazed back at him with a dull, strange lack of interest. She wore a frayed apron over a faded, old fashioned dress. Her nondescript hair was drawn in a prim knot at the back of her long, lean neck.

Dexter recognized the woman from Stella's letters. Her name, according to Stella, was Abigail. He recalled Stella having added that there was something wrong with Abigail's mind, though the woman was an efficient housekeeper and cook. He said carefully:

"I have come to see Mr. Ballou about the position he has open here. My name is Anthony Dexter." He didn't think it necessary to add that this was the alias he was currently using. In the past he had changed his name almost as often as he changed his shirts. He had been cautious enough to do so in the present instance, despite the fact that Stella had taken pains to see that Ballou didn't learn of the letters she wrote.

Nothing moved in Abigail's bony face. Thinking she had not understood him, Dexter repeated what he had said. Finally she gave a slow nod and motioned for him to enter.

He strode into a gloomy, large hall. Abigail closed the door and then moved out of sight into a room down the hall. After a moment she reappeared and beckoned.

Tense and more apprehensive than he cared to admit, Dexter strode in

her direction. She motioned again, and he turned into a huge library, the curtains of which had been drawn. The only illumination was provided by a parchment-shaded lamp which stood on a great oakwood desk. Books lined the walls, tier after tier of books, rising up to the shadowed ceiling. At one side of the room was a tall fireplace, before which armchairs and endtables were arranged. A low fire burned, filling the air with a pungent scent.

Seated in a wheelchair before the desk was an old man, with shaggy white hair that fell dishevelledly over a domed forehead. He had a yellowish, emaciated face in which black eyes burned with a feverish brightness. His body, in a wrinkled black suit, was stooped and gaunt, but there were indications that he had once been a big man.

Dexter needed nothing more to assure him that he was looking at Martin Ballou. Stella's descriptions had been deft and thorough. He donned a pleasant expression and approached with outstretched hand. Ballou's bony grasp was oddly hot and dry.

"You must pardon me for not rising," Ballou said gravely. "I'm not exactly a cripple, but the exertion required would be too much for me."

Dexter nodded quickly. "That's quite all right, I assure you." He sat down as Ballou indicated a chair beside the desk. He tried to look interested and sympathetic without seeming eager or servile.

Ballou shifted in the wheelchair. "I've been ill so long that I've grown accustomed to it. I have to be, you know. There's nothing our medical science can do. The disease I have isn't of earthly origin. I caught it on another—" Ballou's voice broke off. He shrugged slightly and glanced at the papers scattered over

the surface of the desk. After a moment he said, "I understand you came to see me about a position, Mr. Dexter."

"Yes. I heard in Creston that you were looking for someone to serve as secretary and nurse."

"No doubt you heard other things as well. About this house, I mean."

"To be quite frank, I have."

"And yet you weren't frightened away?"

Dexter grinned and lifted one shoulder. "I don't believe everything I hear. I've learned that people have a habit of exaggerating."

Ballou shook his white mane slowly. "Perhaps, Mr. Dexter, you will be surprised to know that the people in Creston weren't exaggerating. This is a strange house. You certainly must have noticed that on your way here."

"I saw and felt some queer things—but I hardly regard them as supernatural. There must be some sort of a scientific explanation for them."

"There is, Mr. Dexter. I've known the explanation for a long time. In fact, it was because of this that I built the house here. The queer things you experienced really existed long before the house, you know."

Dexter nodded. "I heard something to that effect in Creston."

"I haven't tried to make a secret of it," Ballou said. He studied Dexter a moment, then leaned forward in the wheelchair, his black, too-bright eyes intent. "I like your level-headed attitude, Mr. Dexter. But there is something I don't understand. Why, precisely, did you apply for the position with me?"

"Because it's unusual," Dexter said calmly. "Because it offers a certain amount of novelty and excitement. And finally because of the possible salary involved. With your difficulty

in obtaining help, it seemed to me that you would be willing to pay well."

Ballou smiled wryly. "Quite true. But didn't it occur to you that you might be exposing yourself to danger?"

"You have been exposed to the same danger for many years, Mr. Ballou—and you have survived it. I think I should be able to do the same."

Ballou looked pleased. He closed his eyes and leaned back in the wheelchair, as though the effort of leaning forward had been too much for him. Finally he looked at Dexter again. He said:

"Tell me about yourself, Mr. Dexter."

* * *

DEXTER spoke smoothly, basing his story on many real facts, but making up the greater part of it as he went along. He told of a college education, followed by a period as a newspaper reporter. This, he said, had led to his becoming foreign correspondent for a news service. He had visited most of the important spots in Europe and the Far East. On one of his tours he had become acquainted with a wealthy globe-trotter and had accepted an offer to become a professional companion. He had enjoyed this sort of work, and later, on his return to the States, had served as secretary to a succession of influential persons. He had come to Creston, he finished, because of an opening in a neighboring town, which he had decided not to accept. It was while in Creston that he had heard of the position with Ballou.

Dexter knew his story was convincing. As a confidence man, he'd had much practice in making even the most outrageous lies seem plausible.

Ballou nodded in evident satisfaction. "You'll do, Mr. Dexter. In fact, you're just the sort of person I need. I prefer to have a man working for me anyway, as men know when to leave well enough alone. Women are much too curious—except, of course, for women in my housekeeper's mental condition. Curiosity in a house as this is dangerous."

"I take it," Dexter said, "that you are referring to the persons who are reported to have disappeared here."

"Not everyone has disappeared from inside the house," Ballou responded, shrugging. "But where the house is concerned, it must be kept in mind that there are some places where it is not safe to go. As long as one avoids those places, there is no danger. That's why I have survived this long."

Dexter carefully masked his disappointment. He had been hoping to learn something about Stella, but it seemed that Ballou didn't intend to volunteer information. Perhaps he would in time. Dexter told himself that he would have to be patient. It wouldn't be wise to ask too many questions at this early stage of the business.

He listened with a pretense of deep interest as Ballou outlined his new duties. He was relieved to learn that these wouldn't be difficult or exhausting. And the salary he was to receive proved to be surprisingly large. He was awed by the indication this gave of the extent of Ballou's hidden fortune. His determination to find it grew even greater.

Finally he rose to leave. He was to obtain his belongings in Creston and return to the house, where he would have dinner with Ballou that evening. The old man, it seemed, wanted him to begin his duties at once. This suited Dexter. The sooner

he got started, the quicker Ballou's money would be in his hands.

He was in a jubilant mood as he returned to Creston. He did not even mind the film of dust that formed on his shoes and trouser cuffs.

* * *

AFTER a week Dexter was well settled in his duties at the house. Each morning he assisted Ballou to bathe and dress. Then he helped the old man into the wheelchair and pushed him to the head of the stairs, which led from the second floor to the first. Ascent and descent of the wheelchair was facilitated by a small elevator platform, which was raised and lowered along the stairway by means of a cable and crank arrangement.

Dexter had already noticed sinister possibilities in this device. It could be weakened in such a way as to send Ballou shooting down the stairs. An old man, and sick, he would never survive the fall. His death would be considered an unfortunate accident.

Dexter filed the idea away for future reference. The main thing for the present was to find where the old man's money was hidden.

Once they had reached the lower floor, Dexter and Ballou would have breakfast. Dexter found himself looking forward to each meal, for despite her mental short-comings Abigail was a remarkably good cook. She was an industrious and painstaking housekeeper as well. She kept to herself and seemed to spend all her waking hours in work of one kind or another.

After breakfast, Dexter would wheel Ballou into the library, where they would begin the day's tasks. This at first consisted of numerous letters and bills. In dealing with the latter, Dexter was given ample proof of Stella's claim that Ballou did not

keep his funds in a bank. The old man produced the money in mysterious fashion, in cash, and in the large amounts that the bills required. Dexter concealed his excitement with an effort.

With the other details out of the way, Ballou began directing Dexter's assistance upon a project which was to prove their main occupation for the greater part of each day. Ballou, it became evident, was writing a series of books concerning a rather involved and perplexing subject called *The Plurality of Adjacent Space-Time Continua*. He had already completed a couple of volumes, though it appeared that he had made no effort as yet to get them published. Dexter wondered about that.

"The things you're writing about are fascinating, sir," he said one morning. "I don't understand why you aren't having them published somewhere."

Ballou shook his shaggy white mane slowly. "This subject is dynamite, Dexter. If published now, it would cause a horde of doubters and believers to descend on me overnight. I'm too old and too weak to be the center of such a whirlpool. These books will be published after my death—and not before. I intend to set aside sufficient funds for that purpose. Then the storm of pro and con may rage about this house as violently and as long as it pleases."

"About this house?" Dexter echoed, puzzled.

"Naturally," Ballou said. "This house is the center of everything I've been writing about. This house stands as concrete, living proof of every word. In the end, this house will silence every scoffer and start the biggest revolution in all scientific and human history. Remember the gold rushes of the past, Dexter? Well, they

will be ripples in a puddle compared to this. For this, Dexter, will be a world rush!"

Dexter was more puzzled than ever. "Do you mean other worlds in the Universe, sir? But I don't see how anyone could reach them."

"I mean other worlds in other universes," Ballou said. "That is a distinction with a very great difference as regards reaching them."

Ballou did not seem disposed to pursue the matter further, and Dexter thought it wise to ask no more questions for the time being. It wouldn't do to be too curious.

Dexter followed this policy closely as the days passed. He kept his mouth closed and his eyes open. He didn't try to search for Ballou's hidden money. Until he knew more about the house, this would be too dangerous. Still vivid in his mind was the mystery of Stella's own disappearance.

He realized that Ballou was the only source of information about the house, and that only through the old man would he learn the things needed to guide him in his quest. He sought to ingratiate himself with Ballou to the point where the other's caution and reserve would break down.

ACCORDINGLY, he worked hard and sought to be as pleasant and helpful as he could without overdoing it. He pretended a deep sympathy and concern regarding Ballou's infirmities. When Ballou happened to be in a talkative mood—though, as it annoyingly happened, not on matters regarding the house—he listened with an outward display of intense interest.

Dexter despised chess, but in the evenings he frequently played the game with Ballou. They would arrange the pieces on a small table before the library fireplace and think

out their moves amid a deep silence that gradually made Dexter want to scream and break furniture. The acting and the monotony were getting under his skin. He was growing impatient for a change of scene. If he didn't get hold of the money before much longer, he told himself, he'd go completely mad.

What kept him from attempting a drastic course of action was the fact that he was succeeding in ingratiating himself with Ballou. If the other had had any suspicions of him in the beginning, he now felt certain that they had vanished.

One afternoon Dexter made a mistake in some notes he was taking. Ballou corrected him and then sat for a moment in musing silence before he resumed work. Abruptly he said:

"Dexter, it has occurred to me that I've been keeping you in the dark as regards the house and the way in which it is connected with the work we've been doing. I now realize that this is hindering your efforts to help me. That isn't fair to you, for you've been a fine assistant in every way.

"You mustn't think me a secretive or suspicious old man. The truth is that the explanation for the house is completely incredible, and I didn't know how you would take it. I didn't want to frighten you away, or at the very least to give you serious doubts about my sanity. The house is proof of everything, but I feared to arouse your interest in it to the extent where you would want...well, to explore. There is danger in that, for it is how others had disappeared."

"I understand, sir," Dexter said, feeling a rising excitement. "I'm curious, of course, but not curious enough to risk my neck."

Ballou smiled. "Very well. I'll ex-

plain just why this house is so strange." He settled himself in the wheelchair and gazed ruminatively into distance. "The whole thing, Dexter, really goes back to the time when I was still quite a young man. I'd had an excellent scientific education, but I wasn't interested in any of the usual commercialized outlets for what I had learned. I could afford to do as I pleased, for I had inherited a considerable amount of money.

"What I wanted to do was to investigate the wide range of mysterious occurrences and phenomena which other scientists had been unable to explain and had therefore chosen to ignore. Why, I wanted to know, were there in numerous parts of the world spots where persons continually disappeared, or where weird physical effects took place? Why were these spots different? Why did things happen within them that went contrary to all scientific laws?

"It took me over thirty years to answer those questions. I traveled all over the world, frequently to places so remote that few white men had ever visited them. I witnessed dozens of incredible phenomena and carried out endless experiments. I formed and discarded one theory after another. Finally I settled here in Creston, because this was one of the few places in the world where a number of strange manifestations existed simultaneously. It was here that I discovered the key to the entire puzzle."

BALLOU leaned forward, his feverishly bright eyes glittering. "Dexter, each mysterious phenomenon I had seen did not follow laws that held good in all other parts of our world. Each followed laws of its own—and this because each was

a manifestation of a different world. And by this I mean worlds co-existing with ours, in the same place, but in other orders of space-time.

"These other orders, or planes, are made possible by the fact that each possesses a different fundamental atomic vibration rate. Because of their different vibration rates, each world co-existing with ours remains unknown and intangible to the other—that is, under ideal conditions. Actually, the co-existing worlds are not perfectly superimposed, and as a result they cross or intersect. At these intersections there is a partial cancelling out of vibration rates. Where numerous co-existing worlds intersect in the same place, as here, this cancelling out process is even more extensive. Weak spots are formed in which the physical conditions of one world manifest themselves in the order, causing apparently inexplicable phenomena in each. If persons blunder into these weak spots, they...disappear. In other words, they pass through what is really a gateway to another plane."

"Don't they ever return?" Dexter asked.

"Very rarely—if ever," Ballou said. "The gateways are invisible, you know. That makes them hard to find, especially when one is frightened silly by what has happened."

"But I presume you have safely entered several of these gateways."

Ballou nodded. "I knew what I was dealing with, of course. I made preparations beforehand so that nothing would go wrong. This house was a major part of those preparations."

"You see, Dexter, I carefully mapped out the points where the different worlds intersected ours. I learned that they did not do so at the same levels. Some could be

reached only by constructing tall ladders or platforms, but you may well imagine the amount of curiosity this would have aroused. The platforms would have been in plain view, and I couldn't very well have undertaken any explorations with a mob of townfolk watching. I finally hit upon the idea of building a house in this spot with the various rooms and floors coinciding with the different gateways. Allowing for this in the design resulted in a very odd-looking house.

"As for the other co-existing worlds I have visited, many are a lot like ours. Some are even more beautiful. A few contain intelligent life, though nothing like us in appearance, and not as highly developed. What will prove most interesting to the great majority of people on our world, however, is that the other co-existing worlds are treasure troves in the way of untapped natural resources. At first I myself was not above digging feverishly for such things as gold, silver, and precious gems. These have furnished me with more money than I'll ever be able to use."

Dexter's thoughts whirled. Gold... silver... precious gems! Why, Ballou must have several hundred thousands hidden away! He fought to conceal his eagerness as the old man spoke again.

"You may have noticed, Dexter, that most of the rooms in the house are kept locked. This is because they contain gateways and are not safe to enter without proper precautions. I had the locks installed after several persons disappeared in those rooms. I had warned them, naturally, but for one reason or another they chose to ignore it."

"But didn't you try to search for them?" Dexter asked.

"How could I have known where to look?" Ballou countered. "There are many rooms, you know. In addition, the time rates of the other co-existing planes are different from our own. An hour here may be weeks in another plane. During that period, those who disappeared would get so far from the gateway that it would have required a large search party to find them."

Ballou shrugged, dismissing the subject. He straightened in the wheelchair. "Now that I've told you about the other planes, Dexter, perhaps you would like to see a few, if only as proof that what I have told you isn't a lot of nonsense."

Dexter rose eagerly. "I certainly would like that! That is," he added quickly, "if there's no danger."

"There is no danger connected with what I intend to show you," Ballou said with a smile of reassurance.

* * *

AT THE old man's directions, Dexter pushed the wheelchair from the library and to a locked door at the end of a long, crazily twisting hall on the first floor of the house. Ballou produced a ring of keys from his pocket, each key of which, Dexter noted, had been stamped with a number. Glancing at a number which had been painted in small letters on the door, Ballou selected a corresponding key. He unlocked the door and unhesitatingly wheeled himself into the room beyond.

Dexter watched, a sudden apprehension holding him motionless. He saw Ballou silhouetted in the light from a dusty window in the opposite wall of the room. The old man was moving toward it—and then, without warning, he was gone.

As Dexter stared, he heard Ballou calling him. The other's voice was faint, as though it came from a vast

distance, or through a solid medium.

"Dexter! Come—step through. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Swallowing, his body cold and rigid, Dexter reluctantly approached the spot where he had last seen Ballou. The window was directly before him, the empty room solid and seal on all sides. He could see no evidence of the opening between worlds into which Ballou had vanished. It seemed incredible that there could be such an opening.

Dexter took one slow step after another, his hand outstretched before him, like one who gropes for abstractions in a dark room. He felt nothing—until, abruptly, the floor seemed to sink beneath him and a wrenching sensation gripped his body.

In the next instant the window he had seen before him was gone. The room was gone. He found himself standing on a stretch of knee-high grass that was an odd bright-green in color. Overhead was a cloudless, vivid blue sky, and on all sides was a breath-taking mountain vista that spread as far as the eye could reach.

Seated in the wheelchair several feet away, Ballou was smiling in amusement. "Well, Dexter, do you still have any doubts?"

Dexter shook his head slowly, awed. "Where...where are we?" he asked.

"On another co-existing world, of course," Ballou said. "Did you feel a sort of twisting an instant before you found yourself here? That was due to the atoms of your body adjusting themselves to the different vibration rate of this plane. Without that adjustment it would not be possible for us to exist here."

"And we adjust to our former rate when we return?" Dexter said.

"Naturally." Ballou glanced about for a moment, then gestured. "Well, Dexter, we had better go back. There

is much more to see, you know."

They reached the room on the other side of the gateway without difficulty. Ballou seemed to possess an unerring sense of direction.

* * *

GUIDED by the old man, Dexter pushed the wheelchair to other rooms on different floors of the house. Their progress led through halls that slanted or tilted weirdly, up stairways that were grotesquely distorted and somehow always much longer or shorter than the height of the floors they ran to. As he passed through the different parts of the house, Dexter experienced a variety of queer sensations. A feeling of unnatural heaviness would be followed by one of sudden vertigo, as though, momentarily, the house were whirling about him. Then he would seem to be floating in the air, or, later, pushing his way through an invisible resisting medium as dense as water.

His glimpses of the worlds that existed beyond the various rooms held him spellbound. Once he stood on a strip of rocky beach against which beat the waves of an unknown sea, while all around him enormous cliffs towered up into the dark sky, where three great moons shone brightly. Later he found himself in the midst of a hot, lush jungle where the vegetation was a lurid crimson, and the sky, visible in patches through intervening tiers of huge leaves and boughs, was a brilliant emerald-green. He and Ballou left hastily when a gigantic, scaled reptile appeared and began lumbering in their direction.

One other scene remained fixed in Dexter's memory. Emerging from a different gateway, he found himself, with Ballou, on a long road paved with crudely-hewn blocks of stone. At one end of it was what seemed

to be a walled town, also of stone. The town appeared to be under siege, for it was surrounded by a horde of shouting, milling figures, dimly discernible through the purple dusk that hung over the scene. Fires burned in the town, and the screams of its inhabitants mingled with the crash and clatter of battle.

There was a savage and utterly alien quality about the proceedings that chilled Dexter. He was glad to leave when Ballou suggested it. The old man feared that other denizens of that particular world might appear along the road should he and Dexter remain too long.

"I think we have done enough sight-seeing for the present, Dexter," Ballou said, after they had returned to the house. "I'm not well, you know, and these trips are exhausting. Some other time we'll visit the remaining rooms--those that are safe, that is."

Dexter nodded, watching as Ballou locked the door of the room they had left and replaced the ring of keys in his pocket. Then he wheeled the old man back to the library, thinking of the other places he had seen. A sudden realization struck into him. All along he had been wondering where Ballou kept his money hidden. Now he thought he knew.

On one of those other places, of course. This was much safer than hiding the money in some more obvious place within the house itself.

But which place? That was something he had still to learn--and he knew how it could be accomplished. He had only to get his hands on the ring of keys. Then he could visit the other places into which he and Ballou had not yet gone. Most likely the old man had a cache on one of them. It wouldn't be far from the

gateway that led to it, and there would be visible evidence that Ballou visited it frequently.

Determination hardened in Dexter. He told himself he would wait until Ballou slept. Then he would go to the old man's room and steal the keys.

With the end of his quest now almost in sight, Dexter seethed with impatience. It seemed that night would never come. But at last Ballou laid aside the book he had been reading and announced that he was going to bed.

Dexter wheeled the old man to his room and helped him to undress. He noted that the keys were left in Ballou's coat, which he hung in the closet. He didn't dare remove them then, fearing to make a betraying noise.

* * *

FINALLY he said good-night to Ballou and went to his own room. He lighted a cigarette and sat down on the bed to wait. It wasn't until almost two hours had passed that Dexter felt certain Ballou was asleep. He returned to the old man's room. Moving stealthily through the darkness, he went to the closet and carefully removed the ring of keys from Ballou's coat.

He hurried back to the door. In his eagerness to begin the search, he forgot caution. He blundered into a table, which went crashing to the floor.

While Dexter stood rigid with dismay, there was the creaking of bed-springs. Light from a bedside lamp abruptly flooded the room. Ballou, his hand on the lamp switch, blinked at Dexter in perplexity.

"Why, Dexter! What is the matter?" And then the old man's probing gaze settled upon the keys clutched in Dexter's hand. A frown of swift suspicion appeared on his gaunt face.

"Dexter—you took the keys! What were you trying to do?"

Frenziedly Dexter sought for an excuse. Even in this emergency his long training in glib falsehoods did not desert him. "I thought I heard a noise in one of the locked rooms down the hall," he said, launching into a smooth improvisation. "It worried me, I thought someone who had disappeared might have found his way back. The idea seemed rather far-fetched, and so I decided not to awaken you."

Ballou fingered his jaw thoughtfully. "It's possible," he said. "But, Dexter, you would have been taking a considerable risk. You might accidentally have gone through one of the dangerous gateways. After this just ignore any noises you hear." He extended his hand. "The keys, Dexter. Give them to me."

A black anger rose in Dexter. He told himself he wouldn't be thwarted so easily after he had come this far. Yet a sudden cunning kept him from refusing outright to turn over the keys.

He went over to the bed with a rueful grin. "I didn't intend to do anything wrong, sir. I'll admit I was impulsive, but I hope you won't overlook the possibility that it may sometime be necessary for me to go through the gateways for one reason or another. It might be a wise precaution to know which are dangerous."

"True," Ballou said, nodding slowly. He hesitated, then searched among the keys and held one out. "The gateway in this particular room must be avoided at all costs, Dexter. I'll give you a list of the others later."

Dexter bent to peer at the number on the key. Eleven. It was with an effort that he kept a grin of triumph from showing on his face. He knew

why Ballou was warning him away from this room—because it was beyond the gateway within it that the old man had his money hidden.

All the impatience of the past weeks surged over Dexter in an overpowering wave. Why wait any longer? Why go on with the pretense? The keys were just within reach. All he had to do—

His expression must have warned Ballou. The old man stiffened and his mouth opened for a scream. But almost in the same instant Dexter leaped forward, his hands closing on Ballou's throat.

Old and weak, Ballou did not put up much of a struggle before he died.

Then Dexter straightened, breathing hard. He listened intently for a moment, thinking of Abigail. But the house was quiet. It was evident that Abigail remained unaware of what had happened.

Dexter returned his attention to Ballou. Disposing of the old man would be no problem. He would simply wheel Ballou into one of the gateways. Ballou would thus disappear, a fact which would surprise no one in Creston, considering the sinister reputation of the house. Dexter would disappear, too, in a different way. He would have nothing to fear. It would be impossible to prove that he had murdered Ballou.

He took the keys from where they had fallen and slipped from the room. In the hall he listened again. The quietness of the house remained unbroken. Finally, with an anticipatory grin, he hurried to the door with the number eleven painted on it.

The room beyond was pitch black. Dexter searched for his matches, struck one, and peered at the dust-covered floor. Elation reared through him. There were wheel marks in the dust, a large number of them, indi-

cating that Ballou had been a frequent visitor to this room.

But there was something else as well. A bolt had been fixed to the floor, and tied to this was a length of rope that disappeared into nothingness several feet away.

Dexter's grin broadened. A complete giveaway! The rope led to Ballou's cache, of course.

* * *

TRIUMPH bubbled like wine in Dexter's veins. The money was as good as in his hands right now. Ahead of him lay a life of luxury and ease. He would assume another name and become a man of culture in fact. He wouldn't have to take risks any longer. He wouldn't have to act and pretend.

The match burned his fingers, recalling him to the task at hand. He lighted another and followed the rope to the point where it disappeared. Without warning a sudden dizziness seized him, but it was a familiar sensation now, and he was not alarmed. He knew he was going through the gateway.

And then something happened that he hadn't expected. He fell. And kept falling. He seemed to fall for a long time. Then he hit—water.

It closed about him, dark and cold, and he shot down and down. Water filled his eyes, his ears, his mouth, emphasizing with its soaking wetness the horror that flamed in his mind. He flailed frantically with arms and legs, and slowly he began to rise.

He broke surface, gulping down great breaths of cold, damp air. Paddling water, he glanced about him.

There was very little to see. A vast, gray ocean spread everywhere he looked, meeting at the far horizon the gray sky overhead.

Despair spread like a terrible sickness through Dexter. No land. Noth-

ing he could use to keep himself afloat. He knew he couldn't keep swimming indefinitely. His strength would soon be exhausted.

He gazed upward in the direction from which he had fallen. His eyes widened. Suspended in the air about twenty feet above him was a square metal box. It looked like—and Dexter knew it was—a money box. It hung from a length of rope which disappeared into nothingness several feet above it. That nothingness, Dexter realized, was the gateway to this particular plane—the gateway too high for him to reach.

Ballou, it seemed, had arranged a clever trap. He had suspended the money box through the gateway by means of the rope. Anyone following the rope, and unaware of the much lower level of the plane beyond, would fall; and would be trapped in this other-world ocean.

Dexter was still paddling water and staring up at the box, when the thing came up out of the dark depths and wrapped its hungry tentacles around him. He had time only for a thin blast of terror before the ocean closed with a bubbling rush over his head.

AMAZING STORIES CROSSWORD PUZZLE

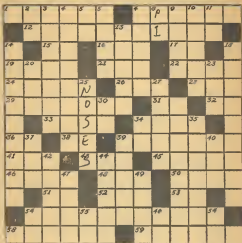
By

Marion Beuscher

HORIZONTAL

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1. Martin Luther told of by Wilson | 4. Slave |
| 2. Alternative | 6. Proposition |
| 12. AMAZING stories' department | 8. Symbol for actinium |
| 15. Japanese drama | 9. Red-shaped bacteria |
| 16. Bless | 41. Alleviated particles conveying negative |
| 21. Symbol for neon | 43. Mineral spring |
| 38. Moon ghost | 45. Woody plants |
| 51. Signature (abbr.) | 46. Female student |
| 52. Exalted narrative poem | 47. Sprite |
| 54. Bailou | 50. Short form: comprehensive test |
| 55. Starter | 51. Symbol for sodium |
| 58. Petal design | 52. Through |
| 59. Fortresses | 53. Third base, diamond pole |
| 61. Right (abbr.) | 54. Unitedly |
| 62. Notary Public (abbr.) | 55. Minor Greek divinity |
| 65. Sepulchral chamber | 59. Inevitable |

AMAZING STORIES CROSSWORD PUZZLE



TOMILSON had barely drifted off to sleep when the yap, yap, yap, of the frightened puppy awakened him. At first he thought the sound was coming from outside the house but when he heard the rattle of claws on wood, he realized the puppy was right in the room with him. That woke him up, but fast. He snapped the light on.

"Hey, pup, how'd you get in here?"

LAND

He was certain he had put the cat checked the screens before coming to bed.

out and looked all the doors and

At the flare of light, the puppy crouched in the middle of the floor. Then, as the man in bed seemed friendly, it moved toward him, whimpering.

Tomilson's scalp lifted straight up on the top of his head and goose pimples as big as hailstones leaped into existence all over his body.



The room was flooded with light revealing a really grinning dog—but what a dog! He had eight legs!

of the GOLDEN MEN

By Robert Moore Williams

It's not so odd to wake up and find a dog
in your bedroom—but it is odd if the dog has
eight legs and a gold chain around his neck!

The puppy had eight legs!

It also had a little leather harness and a frayed, inch long length of broken metal chain dangling from a ring in the harness but Tomilson was too startled by the sight of the eight legs to notice these evidences of domesticity. He jumped up in bed and grabbed for a chair. The mattress yielded under his feet, he lost his footing, grabbed at the head of the bed, missed it, hit the night table and knocked the lamp from it. Both Tomilson and the lamp landed at the same time, with a thunderous crash. The broken bulb flared into incandescence, a sharp pain shot up Tomilson's left arm, and the noise and the shaking of the bed awakened his wife.

"Joe! What happened?"

"I fell out of bed, Get up and turn

on the overhead light, willya?" The bed creaked as she started to get out. "But be careful," Tomilson answered. "There's an eight-legged puppy in the room."

The bed creaked again, as she got back in. "An eight-legged—" He heard her catch her breath. "Joe Tomilson, have you got a bottle hid out up there in the attic? Is that what you're actually doing when you pretend to be so busy with all that radio junk you've got up there—"

"It's not junk!" Tomilson shouted, outraged. In that attic was one of the finest collections of ham radio equipment ever assembled anywhere and he wanted her to know it. He spent many happy hours dreaming up new circuits and new sets to build up in that attic.

"But an eight-legged—"



The puppy yapped.

"Joe! What is that?"

Claws rattled on the floor and Tomilson felt a cold but friendly nose explore his bare shanks, which helped him to get to his feet, fast. For all he knew a puppy which had eight legs might have poison fangs too. He turned on the overhead light.

"Joe!" his wife yelled.

The puppy danced around his feet. "I told you it had eight legs," he said. "Easy, pup. I'm a guy who likes dogs."

His wife climbed up on the head of the bed and clutched her nightgown firmly about her. Goggle-eyed she stared at the puppy. "It has got eight legs!" she whispered.

"Where do you keep your bottle?" Tomilson asked. He was examining his left wrist. As long as he held it still, it didn't hurt too much, but a sudden movement brought sharp pain.

"Joe, where did that puppy come from? Joe, how did it get in here?"

"Easy. You'll wake Sistle," he warned. The patter of bare feet in the hall told him that Sistle was already awake. Rubbing sleep from her eyes, clutching her precious pink teddy bear that she slept with, her curly hair all tousled, she came into the room. She was four years old. For a moment she morosely regarded her parents, apparently preparing to give them hell for waking her, then she saw the dancing puppy. And exploded with glee.

"A PUPPY! A real live puppy! Daddy, why didn't you tell me?"

The puppy recognized a friend when he saw one. Claws rattling on wood, he leaped—straight in Sistle's

arms. She grabbed him. He kissed her and she kissed him. He yelped and she shrieked. There was joy in the sounds. The old house echoed with gladness. Happiness was a warm feeling in the very air.

The puppy kissed her again, with darting motions of a red, forked tongue.

Tomilson knew what was going to happen next. He prepared himself to say "No," firmly, the way a father should. As though she sensed his intention, Sistle suddenly looked at him. A pair of mute, but utterly appealing eyes fixed themselves on him. In the face of that appeal he felt his resolution washing away.

"Can I keep him, Daddy? Daddy, can I keep him? Daddy—"

Tomilson swallowed. "Until his owner comes to claim him."

"Joe!" His wife had found the courage to come down from the head of the bed. "Where did that puppy come from? How did he get in here? How does it happen that he's got eight legs?"

The eight legs worried his wife. They didn't worry Sistle. She had been begging for months for a puppy. Now that she had one she didn't care if he had forty legs.

"Joe—"

"I'll find out how he got in, dear."

Downstairs, Tomilson checked the kitchen door, the sunporch door, the front door, and the basement door. They were all closed and locked. The screens on the windows were latched. Beginning to feel uncomfortable, he went back over his route and checked every door again. It came out the same way, all doors locked, all window screens latched. His feeling of discomfort grew. The puppy was in. It had to get in some way, but there wasn't any way it could have gotten

into the house. No way at all. .

The big combination radio-phonograph in the living room was still on. He had made this set himself, except for the cabinet, incorporating five speakers, a crystal pickup, and circuits of his own design. It was a dream set and it included a time clock so that it could be left running at bedtime and it would turn itself off later. Somehow the time clock had failed to function and the set was still on. He turned it off.

"Joe!" That was his wife from the head of the stairs.

"The back door was open," he answered.

"Oh," She seemed satisfied, about that at least, but other questions were hothering her. They were hothering Tomlinson too, though he took care not to admit it. "But—but where did the puppy come from, dear?"

He thought fast, on that one. "I—ah—saw a fleet of carnival trucks passing through town this afternoon. Maybe the carnival had him in a sideshow."

The explanation satisfied her and it proved, conclusively, if any proof was needed, that Tomlinson was a married man. He took the puppy down to the basement and made a bed for it, out of an old box and some rags. The puppy, oddly enough, seemed to understand that it was supposed to sleep there. As he fixed the bed, with Sistic's eager help, the puppy persisted in licking his left wrist. The forked red tongue was singularly soothing and cooling and it made him forget, for the time at least, the dull pain throbbing there. He practically had to order Sistic upstairs to bed. He half expected, awakening in the morning, to find the puppy upstairs in bed with her.

But he was mistaken. The puppy was in bed with him. Snuggled up against him, it was licking his left arm. As soon as he opened his eyes, it stood up and stretched.

He eased it gently to the floor. Eight legs pattered softly out of the room. Watching the twinkling motions of those legs, deep fears moved vague and formless in Tomlinson's mind. He got quickly out of bed and followed the little beast.

AS THOUGH it knew where it was going, it went straight to Sistic's room. Jumping up into her bed, it curled up in a ball at her feet. She was still asleep. Tomlinson watched for a moment, then, satisfied that everything was all right, went downstairs to repeat his search of the night.

He got the same results. So far as he could tell, there was no way the puppy could have gotten into the house. As he shaved and dressed and ate breakfast—avoiding his wife's questions as best he could—he was preoccupied with the problem. So far as he could see, there was only one answer. The only thing wrong with this answer was the fact that, so far as he knew, it was impossible. It also gave him the shivering horrors just to think about it.

Driving to his office, he was still preoccupied with the problem, with the result that he almost drove head-on into a truck slowing for left turn. Jerking the wheel to avoid a collision, a flash of pain shot up his left wrist.

Until that moment, he had completely forgotten his injury. Reminded now of it, he drove to his doctor's office. The first patient, he had to wait for the medico's arrival.

The doctor listened to his story

and took an X-ray. It was one of those modern machines where the plate is developed almost immediately. The doctor examined the still moist film.

"The bone has been cracked."

"The devil."

"And healed."

"What?"

"You must have cracked an old break over again," the doctor suggested.

"But I've never broken that arm before!" Tomilson protested. "If it's broken, I broke it last night when I fell out of bed."

"You couldn't have broken it last night. It's practically healed. The knitting of the bones has progressed so far I don't even have to bandage it." The doctor smiled, wisely. "You just wrenched an old break, Joe. See the arm isn't even swollen."

"Uh," said Tomilson. "Thanks, doc."

"Just don't put any strain on the arm for a couple of days and it'll be all right," the doctor told him. Bewitched, he went out of the office. This required some thinking about. He knew he had never broken that arm before. Therefore, if it was broken, it had been done last night. The X-ray plate said it had been broken. But the plate also said it had healed.

Driving the rest of the way to office, Tomilson kept thinking about a thin, red, forked tongue. "I am a fool!" he told himself. But there was no conviction in the way he said it.

At his office, his secretary was out in the hall frantically looking for him. "Your wife just called!" the frightened girl told him. "She said for you to come right home. Slatie has disappeared."

"Disappeared?" Slatie was not more than a dozen times more important to him than life itself. "What do you mean?"

"That's what your wife said. And for you to come right right away."

Tomilson didn't see a single stop sign on the way home. Although he was not a rich man, he had visions of Slatie being kidnapped and held for ransom, or, infinitely worse, Slatie being enticed away by a pervert. As he turned into the driveway and jumped out of the car, his heart was pounding like it was going to jump out of his chest.

THE FRONT door opened before he reached it, revealing his wife. Slatie, the signs of a recent debauch in chocolate candy smeared on her cheeks, was tightly clutched in her mother's arms.

"Look, mommy! Daddy's home!"

"I see he is, dear. Isn't that nice?"

Tomilson leaned against the door-facing and waited for his heart to stop acting like it belonged in a high-speed motorcycle. Looking at Slatie, safe and sound in her mother's arms, he felt like his insides had been torn out and put back in again by an inexperienced physician. Wordlessly, he regarded his wife. "You called my office," he said.

"Yes, Joe." She was quite calm, outwardly, but the look on her face told him she wasn't calm, inwardly. However he knew she wouldn't tell him what had happened in Slatie's presence. He gathered the child in his arms and kissed her, ignoring the chocolate, then set her down and patted her round little rear. "See if there is any more candy."

She went, on the jump and run, the puppy turning flips around her on all eight legs. They waited until she was in the house. Then his wife collapsed in his arms.

"What happened?"

"I don't know what happened. I was

washing dishes in the kitchen and she was playing in the living room, dancing. I had turned on her record for her. I could hear her and the puppy. Then—"Her eyes widened as she relived that moment. "—I suddenly realized it had been several minutes since I heard them. I called to her but she didn't answer."

"And you started to look for her?"

"Of course. I turned the house upside down and—" The fear was very plain on her face. "—didn't find her. I went outside and called and she didn't answer. I looked in the basement, I looked upstairs. Then I called you."

"She didn't answer when you called her?"

"No."

"Where did you find her?"

"In the living room. I went upstairs after I called you. Suddenly I heard the puppy yapping downstairs and then I heard her scream. I ran downstairs and she was coming through the hall toward the steps."

"Well," Tomilson said. "I'll bet she was hiding in the front room closet. She didn't answer because she was playing a game."

His wife looked relieved at his words. "That's all there was to it," he said, heartily. "You know she is always playing games that she makes up herself. Run along now, and finish the dishes. I'll talk to her and see if I can find where she was hiding so you will know where to look for her the next time she disappears." He patted his wife encouragingly on the shoulder, then on the fanny. They went into the house together. Seated in front of the coffee table, Sistic was polishing off the last of the chocolate candy. The puppy was also seated at the table.

"Havin' a tea party," Sistic said, to

her parents. Tomilson, watching his wife closely, saw that all concern had vanished from her face. Seating himself on the divan, he wished he could say the same for him. "Did you save some for me?" he asked his daughter. Across the room, he noted that the radio was on. It had played the last record, but the time clock being used only at night, it had not turned itself off.

SISTIC regarded the tiny fraction of chocolate remaining uneaten. She yearned to save some for daddy but she also yearned to eat that piece herself. Tomilson laughed. "Go on and eat it," he said.

The chocolate disappeared as if by magic. The watching puppy ran a red, forked tongue of over thin lips and swallowed.

"Mommy missed you," Tomilson said. In the kitchen he could hear his wife washing dishes. "Where did you go?"

Sistic regarded him wonderingly. "Nowhere."

Tomilson, who knew his daughter better than he knew himself, did not press her for an answer. Instead, he lit a cigarette and looked around for an ash tray. As usual, there wasn't one in sight. He dropped the match behind the divan. The puppy got down from the chair and scampered into the kitchen. Tomilson regarded his daughter. "Did you have fun when you went away?"

"Lots of fun, daddy!" She spread her arms wide to show him how much fun. "But I got scared too."

"Tell me about the fun," he said. The puppy, carrying a small object in its mouth, came from the kitchen and jumped against his leg. He looked down. It was an ash tray the puppy had in its mouth.

"Oh, thanks, pup." He took the ash tray and set it on the end table. The puppy wiggled with pleasure. Tomilson watched it out of the corner of his eye. His face was gray and for a moment he thought his heart had stopped beating. Then it started up again, racing like an automobile engine suddenly thrown out of gear. "What did you see that was so much fun?" he said to Sista.

"What makes your hand shake, daddy?" Sista asked.

"Eh? Oh, it just does that sometimes. Tell me about the fun you had."

"It was the little men that was the mostest fun," she told him, eager enthusiasm in her voice. "They were all gold and they had dug a little hole in the ground and they were building a house in the hole. The house has a lot of funny levers on it—like on your radios up in the attic, daddy—and a bird cage on top of it, but no bird."

She was sad about the bird cage with no bird in it. Tomilson wondered if an antenna system would look like a bird cage to her but decided not to ask. He smiled. "How big were the little golden men?"

"About as big as me," she answered. "Maybe a little bigger. But not much."

A hum and then a soft pop came from the radio loudspeaker. Tomilson frowned. The set was turned to phonograph and it shouldn't be popping in that position. He thought about turning it off, but decided against it. Attracted by the popping sound, the puppy went over and inhaled the radio with its nose, growled once, a low sound deep in the throat, then came back and jumped up on the divan beside Tomilson. He ran his hand across its back. The fur was

soft and fine, almost like wool. Tiny sparks of static electricity jumped between the hairs as he ran his hand over the pup's back.

"Oh, look?" Sista exclaimed. "J'thon sparkled."

"Eh? What? Who?"

"J'thon." She twisted up her lips trying to say the word. "He sparkles."

"J'thon." Tomilson tried the sound of the word. "That your name, pup?"

"Yap," the puppy barked.

Tomilson choked on a mouthful of smoke and dropped the cigarette on the rug and hastily snatched it up and put it out in the ash tray and lit another one. He thought longingly of the whiskey up on the top shelf of the kitchen closet. He needed a drink now if he had ever needed one in his life. But the bottle was in the kitchen and his wife was in there and she would see him taking a drink.

Not that he wanted to deceive her. He just didn't want to scare her.

The puppy ran a red, forked tongue over thin lips. "Can you work magic, pup?" Tomilson blurted out. "Can you heal broken bones and things like that?"

"Yap!" the puppy answered.

Tomilson wiped sweat from his forehead. This is crazy, he told himself. This is nuts. This is the shortest cut to the nearest booby hatch.

HE TURNED again to his daughter and asked her again about the little golden men and the house with the bird cage on top of it. She talked willingly enough, with childish words and gestures, and as she talked a picture began to form in his mind. It was a picture of a gun emplacement except that the weapon emplaced there wasn't a gun, it was a beam projector of some kind. Maybe

It was a radar set-up, maybe it was—something else.

"There were trees all around," Sistic went on, "Only they weren't very big trees. Then the elephant came through the trees—"

"Elephant?"

"Uh-huh. And all the little men got excited. They turned the bird cage around so that it pointed at the elephant. Then it began to lightning and thunder something awful, daddy. Jist something awful. And we got scared and ran away, J'thon and me."

The memory frightened her still though her father was willing to bet she was less frightened than he was. "When you ran away, how did you get back home, Sistic?" he asked.

The question seemed to surprise her. "Why we just came through the little door, daddy?"

"Where is this little door?"

"Right there." She pointed toward the end of the radio phonograph.

Three feet away from the left end of the radio, in a spot where Tomlinson had always intended to place a record cabinet, was a radiator. Unnoticed until now, the space between the radiator and the cabinet did indeed form a kind of a door.

"I'll show you, daddy." Sistic darted toward it. The puppy moved much quicker than her father. Tomlinson didn't quite see how it happened but somehow the pup got tangled between her legs, with the result that she tripped and rolled over and over on the floor. The fall didn't hurt her. It was a game and big fun. Squealing with glee, she darted again toward the radio.

By this time, her father's reflexes were functioning. He grabbed her. "Daddy, you wanted me to show you—" She was surprised and hurt.

"You can show me some other time, Sistic." He was amazed that his voice was still gentle, with no overtones of fright or fear in it, nothing to indicate the apoplexy within him. "I think mommy has finished the dishes. Why don't you ask her to go out in the back yard and play with you. Take J'thon with you."

She started instantly. Tomlinson regarded the place she called a door. He moved toward it.

The puppy moved in front of him. Showing twin rows of sharp teeth, it growled at him.

"Don't worry, J'thon," he said. "I'm not going to commit suicide."

The little beast looked at him and he could swear he could see it making up its mind. Then apparently, satisfied with his ability to take care of himself, it yapped, once, and trotted off after Sistic.

Tomlinson sat down, heavily, on the sofa. Someone seemed to have poured water on him. Examining himself, he found his clothes completely soaked with sweat.

He waited until he heard Sistic and her mother in the backyard. Then he went upstairs, to the attic, to get meters, testing equipment, and tools.

IN THE big attic that he had converted into a ham radio station and amateur laboratory, he paused for a moment, out of old habit, to stare lovingly at the equipment assembled there. On the bench over there was a radio receiver that could pick up a radio whisper from Australia, and had. Across from it was a transmitter that could reply to that whisper, hurling an étheric vibration across half the world. It seemed odd to him now that he had never regarded the operation of that receiver and

transmitter as pure magic. Sure, he knew the laws—or some of them—that governed the radiation and reception of a radio impulse, but he knew he didn't know all of them. Nobody did. Marconi had discovered only fragments of them. Thousands of other experimenters had filled in bits and pieces of the tremendous jigsaw puzzle but nobody had ever really comprehended what happened when a radio signal was transmitted or when it was received. What supernatural laws governed the ion dance between the filaments and plates?

What law of electronics could explain a "door" that opened between an iron radiator and a radio phonograph sitting three feet away from it?

Tomilson was no mystic. His mind moved from law to law but here in his laboratory this morning he felt a touch of mysticism, as though, when he went back downstairs, he would be probing hidden secrets of the universe.

Outside, in the bright day, he heard a burst of laughter. And an eight-legged puppy yapping.

"Oh, Lord!" He whispered. It was a prayer.

Gathering the tools and meters he wanted, he went back downstairs, to check the existence of the door.

Thirty minutes later he knew several things. First, that there was a strong flow of some force of vibration between the radiator and the radio set. The door was there. It registered on his instruments. Since both the radiator and the radio were grounded and were thus in a sense part of a common electronic matrix—he coined that phrase—he assumed this accounted for the vibration field set up between them in much the same way that different turns of wire

on a coil set up a complex magnetic field between them.

He also knew the door was invisible. No way of twisting or turning his head gave him so much as a glimpse of it. There was no blur in the air, no mistiness, no nothing. But his instruments told him the vibration field was there and Sistic and J'thon had told him it was in reality a door, a hole, with one end in his living room and the other end in—the land of the little golden men.

The land of eight-legged puppy dogs with forked tongues that possessed remarkable healing powers, puppy dogs that were natural telepaths.

The land where little golden men set up emplacements of small houses with bird cages on top of them—but without birds in them—from which came thunder and lightning when the elephant intruded.

All you had to do to enter this other land was to step through the "door" between the radiator and the radio.

TOMILSON, wiping sweat from his face, thought about that. Right then he knew what he was going to do. But first, because he liked life as well or better than the next man, he got a tennis ball and tossed it through the vibration field.

The ball went through the field, hit the wall, and bounced back. Tomilson blinked at it. So far as the ball was concerned, there wasn't any "door."

He wondered if there was any "door" at all or was this just his fevered imagination? "Maybe I did break my arm when I was a kid, and didn't know it!"

And Sistic might have been playing a game with him. How could he

know that she was telling what had actually happened or was making up the story?

For a moment, he almost convinced himself that this was the truth. Then he heard again the excited yapping from the backyard. He sighed. J'thon was not a product of Sistic's imagination, or his own either. His instruments said the door was there, J'thon's presence said it was there.

He tied a plastic screwdriver to the end of a yardstick and gingerly thrust it through the hole.

Nothing happened. The screwdriver remained—a screwdriver.

"Damn!" Tomilson said. He didn't know whether he was pleased or annoyed. He paced the floor of the living room, trying to think of something to do next. Sistic's pet kitten came mewing from the kitchen.

"Nice, kitty, pretty kitty."

It submitted to being tied to the yardstick with poor grace. And when it went through the door, it vanished.

The stick remained clearly visible. The strings that held the kitten to it jerked as through some invisible something was trying to free itself but the kitten was—gone.

He yanked on the stick. The kitten came in sight again. All over its body its fur was fluffed out and it acted like it was crazy with fear. Taking it from the stick, Tomilson got himself both scratched and bitten. When he released it, the kitten dashed out of the room like the biggest dog on earth, mouth open and ready to snatch it up, was panting right behind it.

"What the hell scared that cat?" Tomilson thought.

He wasn't a cat. He could duck through and duck back—

Pandora's box never exercised as much attraction for Pandora as did

that "door" for Tomilson. In him was the urge to know why. He smoked a slow cigarette, considering the matter, and wondered why his throat was dry and his hands twitchy. Hell, he could duck back couldn't he?

He wondered where the land of the little golden men was located. In some other space? It could be. It could also be in some other time. There was no way of telling where it was because there was no way of measuring the distance through the door. Taking advantage of his wife's presence with Sistic in the backyard, he sneaked into the kitchen and had a drink, a quick one, straight out of the bottle. When he returned to the living room, he knew he was going through that hole.

He figured he would dive through it, like a swimmer diving into cold water. Holding his breath, he jumped through the area between the radiator and the radio.

Like the tennis ball, he hit the wall. The jolt bloodied his nose and almost knocked him senseless. He sprawled back, falling, hit the floor, and pulled himself up on one hand and sat there, staring at the "door" that wasn't there—for him.

There for Sistic, there for J'thon, there for a kitty, but not there for him!

Was it a question of size? Was the door selective, admitting small objects but rejecting large ones? No. That wasn't all of the story anyhow. It had rejected the tennis ball too and that was smaller than Sistic. Was it a matter of both size and living matter?

MAYBE that was the answer, maybe children and puppies and kitties could go through, but adults couldn't. Suddenly he found himself

thinking of the the gnomes and elves of fairy literature, of dwarfs and goblins. All of them were small creatures and all of them, in the fairy stories, were able to vanish. Did they actually come to earth through doors like this that appeared here and there in the secret places of this world?

He wished to hell he knew!

His nose was bleeding. He went into the washroom on the first floor to get a towel. The back door banged. Claws rattled on linoleum in the kitchen. He heard feet p patter on the bare floor between the living and dining rooms.

"Sistie! Don't go into the living—"

"Oh, daddy, look!"

He got in there, fast. It was on the living room rug in front of the radio, a mottled length of something that was neither a snake nor a lizard, but which seemed to have the characteristics of both. Light played across golden scales flecked in regular patterns over a purple body as the thing turned beady eyes toward them. It was one of the most beautiful creatures he had ever seen.

"Daddy, it's pretty—" Sistie started toward it, to pet it.

It lifted its head and Tomilson, his throat muscles paralyzed so that he could not shout to her to stay away, that it might be dangerous, leaped forward to jerk her back.

J'thon was a streak ahead of him, leaping at the creature in front of the radio. As he leaped it struck at him, like a snake striking. The puppy's jaws closed over its neck, there was a crunching sound. J'thon shook it, like a terrier shaking a rat, then with a final shake of his head, flung

it away from him. The puppy turned and wavered toward Tomilson. There was a hurt look in the pup's eyes, and a glad look too, as though an ancient enemy had been met and conquered, an ancient destiny fulfilled.

Taking three steps, J'thon died.

Tomilson carried Sistie to the backyard. "Go and play with your mother," he said. His tone of voice sent her scampering without a word.

He went back into the living room, and snapped off the radio.

A little later, carrying a bundle wrapped in newspapers, he quietly went out the back door and got in his car and drove quickly away. At the river, he got rid of the bodies.

DAILY since then Sistie has demanded of him what happened to J'thon and daily he has told her that the puppy went away "—to the land of the little golden men."

To his wife, he reported privately that the puppy had had a fit. "I had to get rid of him."

It was an explanation she could and would accept.

Nightly, after his family is asleep, Tomilson has tried to reopen the "door." He has had no success as yet and he has about decided that the door opened in the first place because of some electronic interaction between his radio set and the moveable ray projector that Sistie described to him. He thinks the projector was moved to another location, with the result that the connection was broken.

Tomilson is still trying to find the new location of that projector. He will be trying until he dies.

MESSAGE FROM ABOVE

by A. MORRIS

ROCKETS have recently been sent speeding skyward on exploring expeditions far higher than man has ever been able to go. Some of these flying expeditions have furnished us with very important scientific information. For one thing, rockets have given us detailed records of temperature changes in the upper atmosphere. For some time it was quite a problem to scientists to figure out a way to measure the temperature of the air by using a rocket that was speeding along at a mile a second with no one on board. An ordinary glass thermometer couldn't be used because it would break too easily. An automatic camera that would take pictures of a thermometer at regular intervals might be used if it could be recovered later, but when a rocket falls to the ground from so great a height there is such a crash that there is little left of camera or film.

Because of these crash landings, an automatic transmitter seemed to be the best thing to send up with the rocket to send messages back before the crash. These transmitters can send back readings from electric thermometers as the rocket speeds along.

An electric thermometer is a rather simple gadget consisting of a thin wire through which a small current of electricity flows. The amount of current depends on whether the wire is warm or cold. The warmer the wire, the smaller the current. The thermometer is placed just outside the rocket casing, and by means of signals, the automatic radio in the rocket sends the information to the recorder on the ground.

It seems strange that we have hot and cold in layers in the atmosphere. It has

something to do with the fact that the earth's atmosphere acts as a kind of blanket. Some of the sun's heat comes through the blanket to the surface of the earth. Higher up there are regions that are warmed because there is something in the atmosphere that absorbs part of the sun's rays.

Rockets have also brought us information about the light of the sun. A special automatic camera, a spectrograph, was mounted on the nose of a V-2 rocket and was set to take pictures at regular intervals. This experiment showed that the ultraviolet light found at sea level did not increase much till the rocket reached a height of twenty miles. Between twenty and forty miles up, there was a tremendous increase in the amount of ultraviolet. Scientists explained this as being due to a layer of ozone at that level. Ozone is a gas which literally eats ultraviolet and very little of it gets through to the earth.

At sea level the air pressure is 14.7 pounds per square inch. If you could weigh all the air above a one inch square from here to the top of the atmosphere, you would find that it weighed 14.7 pounds. The higher you go, the less air there is above you, consequently, less pressure. Air is spongy and can be compressed, so the lower atmosphere is much denser than the upper regions. Recently one of our rocket expeditions told us that at seventy miles up there is only 0.000002 lb. pressure per square inch. Above seventy miles there is so little air in that vast amount of space that this distant region comes quite close to being a vacuum.

THE END

SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD PUZZLE



DEATH'S DOUBLE

by GROVER KENT

There was something mighty funny about this window dummy. It had accidents — and others had them too! Or was it an insane delusion?



"What does it mean?" He asked. "Why does the heap always die like this around?"

LOLA WILLIAMS was plenty tough; but she didn't look the part. Lola was so innocent and sweet looking that you'd think she'd be happy with a half-dozen kids on her lap and the baby squeaking in the crib. I guess that's why Bill married her. Poor, dumb Bill Williams. Bill married Lola two years ago. Lola's dark curls and soft brown eyes really looked swell under her bridal veil. Bill, six feet tall and wearing the only dress suit he had ever had on, was so proud that he almost burst the buttons off it during the period when a man says "I do."

I cleared out of Manster Street right after that because I had been sweet on Lola myself, but mostly because she didn't change any. She still called me up and hunted around for dates. I thought more of Bill than I did her, after that. I did a disappearing act to ease the tension and didn't come back to Manster Street for two years.

I knew things weren't going too good the first night I met Bill after I returned. I found him in a little bar on the corner of Manster and Grime.

It's a dirty little place. No sunlight, and a lot of filth hidden in the corners by glowing, subtle lights that make it pleasant at night. I was at the bar, renewing my acquaintance with Louie, the bartender, when Bill came in. He looked gaunt and unshaven, like a man looks when he's been pretty close to the border of Hell and is fighting not to slip over the brink. His eyes lighted up when he saw me and he came across the room in long steps.

"Ward Lawton, you ol' son-of-a-gun."

F stood up and we pounded each other on the shoulders for a while.

Then he sat down and I ordered two beers.

"Where you been keeping yourself?" he asked.

I gave him a short review of two years in Alaska on road construction, and ended up by asking how Lola was. I saw his eyes narrow and a look of fear and concern come slowly over his face.

"She's—all right—I guess."

That was what I was afraid of. I had had an idea it couldn't go smoothly. Lola wasn't a 'stay-at-home'.

"I don't understand," I said. "You don't sound very enthused about marriages."

He shrugged, slipped a little beer and then poured some salt into it. He tried it again, then drained the glass. Louie put a sickle into the juke box and Tommy Dorsey let out with some canned 'Honeysuckle Rose'.

"Ward," Bill said, and stood up. "I want you to come up to the apartment. I got something I want to show you."

I wasn't crazy about going. I didn't want to meet Lola. I'd had my share of fun since she and I kicked around together. No use bringing back memories.

"Ma, I'm pretty busy. Got a lot of ground to cover."

He looked frightened. He put his big hand on my shoulder.

"I know you and Lola used to go together. Listen Ward, she told me all about it. She told me she didn't want me. She even said she would have run away with you after we got married, if you'd wanted her."

I guess it was my turn to feel cold chills.

"Then what the devil do you want me around for?" I asked. "Don't get me wrong. Bill, I'm hands off another man's property. I haven't seen Lola ..."

He nodded and said he knew.

"It's not that," he said. "It's—something pretty bad. You can't let me down."

NO, I couldn't let Bill down. Lola?

I could have kicked her teeth out for hurting him. We went out of the bar, around the corner and up to the apartment.

It was the same place they'd gone after their honeymoon. Things had changed a lot though. Lola let us in. She wore a house coat that almost covered her—but not quite. Her hair was still pretty in a frowzy sort of way and her figure was better, if that were possible. I thought at first she was going to kiss me, but I averted that. Then Bill and I were alone and she was in the bedroom dressing. The apartment had been one of those newly decorated, three-room affairs with varnish that made the floor like a skating rink with bright trimmings. Now it had gone to hell. The place smelled like a stale cabbage and everything in sight looked as though a truck had hit it.

"No kids yet?" I asked, just to make conversation.

Bill didn't say anything. He brought a drink, then went into the closet and came out with a shoebox. His face was very somber when he put the box on my lap.

"I found this in her dresser drawer," he said. His voice sounded like something echoing from a tomb. "Ward—I'm going bass."

This must be pretty bad, I thought. I opened the shoebox. I didn't know whether to laugh or to be startled. Wrapped carefully in tissue paper was the hand and wrist of a department store dummy. The plaster was cracked a little, but the hand looked almost human. The thing that frightened me, and I guess it was what Bill

wanted me to see, was the ring that had been placed carefully on the finger.

It was Bill's ring. The ring was a fraternity signet that I had bought for him when we were at college. It looked odd as hell there on the hand of that dummy. Somehow it held a strange, gruesome significance that made me stare at it silently with cold chills running up and down my back.

Lola was singing happily in the bedroom. She called to me.

"I'll be out in a minute, Ward. We'll all go out and celebrate your return."

I didn't feel like celebrating. I felt like facing her with that dummy hand and making her tell Bill and I what it was all about. There was something unclear about it.

"Okay," I answered. "I can stand a little party. Haven't been out much since I got back."

Bill had taken the shoe box back to the closet. He returned and sat down beside me.

"What do you make of it, Ward?" I kept my voice low.

"Lola works at Worth's, doesn't she?"

Worth's was a big department store downtown, and when I'd left town, Lola had planned to keep her job in the dress department there.

Bill nodded. His forehead was wrinkled with worry.

"She spends most of her time down there. Been promoted to assistant window decorator, or something."

More likely Lola was running around with some punk and told that story to keep Bill quiet. I think he suspected that because he didn't sound as though he'd dared to check up on her.

I grinned.

"Well, then it's all settled, isn't it?" I asked. "That hand is a piece

of a dummy that she uses in the window, and she tried the ring on it for effect."

I don't think that impressed Bill much, but Lola came out then, all silvery in a dress that a working woman could never afford, and started to get her coat from the closet. Bill, still gallant and trying desperately to please her, got the coat and helped her into it. Lola flirted with me and ignored her husband. By the time we got downstairs and into a cab, I could have popped her in the face. It would have been a pleasure to do it, but as much as Bill worried about her, I'm afraid the big goof would have knocked me flat if I touched one hair of her head. Bill was like that—dumb, but so loyal it hurt.

I SHOULD have left town that night. I didn't. I stayed around until Lola and Bill left the bar and went upstairs to their apartment. Then I went down to Worth's department store and spent a half-hour wandering around the full block that the store fills. I studied all the window displays and sure enough, Lola Williams must have had something to do with them. You see, Lola has a touch for choosing men's clothing. I stopped in front of a suit display, where three well-dressed dummies were all smiling at each other, and one of them was displaying a new tie laid out in his hand. The tie was a honey. Only an expert hand could have picked it out. I'd seen one like it before, tonight, draped around Bill's big neck. Lola bought Bill's clothes, and he looked good in them. Lola had fixed up that window all right, because everything in it had her touch.

A couple of details troubled me. The little credit card which hung in

the corner of the window and gave the name of the artist that did the work was marked 'Sigmond Fosse'. Maybe Lola had a sort of 'pen' name. That was her privilege, if she wanted to. I went home and went to bed.

I had just crawled in between the sheets when all the fire sirens in town started to scream. I'll swear one fire truck went right through my bedroom. I climbed out in a hurry and ran to the window. At first I thought there was a fire in the neighborhood. Then when the sirens faded away into the distance, I wasn't so anxious to get dressed and follow them. I crawled back into bed and listened for a long time. It must have been quite a blaze. I kept hearing new sirens, mounting in crescendo, then fading away again. After a while I dropped off to sleep.

THE PHONE kept on ringing. I threw a pillow at it before I got my eyes open. Then, having a pretty clear idea that it was morning and that if anyone wanted to call me up, who the hell was I to throw pillows at them, I sprawled across the bed, grabbed the receiver and said:

"Hello! What's up?"

"I am!" It was Lola Williams' voice, cool and very sweet. "Ward, will you come over for a while. I have to go down to the store, and I hate to leave Bill alone."

Leave Bill alone?

"I don't get it," I said. "Can't he take care of himself yet?"

She laughed just a little. I didn't think it sounded very pleasant.

"The poor little boy burned himself on the gas stove last night. He's in pain. I have to go down to Worth's. A lot of the displays were ruined."

Bill burned and Worth's displays ruined?

"Listen," I said slowly. "I've been

asleep now for exactly ten hours I'm a little slow at grasping things so early in the morning. Start over again and..."

She cut me off with a little gasp of surprise.

"Then you don't know about the fire?"

I was more confused than ever.

"You just told me about Bill being burned. What...."

"The fire at Worth's," she continued. "Half the store was ruined. They want me to work on the displays at once."

I had never heard the woman sound more fascinated. It was as though she enjoyed having her husband burned and her employer lose half a million in merchandise.

"It seems to me that I do remember something about fire trucks howling around after I came in last night," I said, I was beginning to catch on.

"Then you'll come over right away?"

I said I would. By that time you couldn't have kept me away with rope and six cops. When I reached the apartment Lola had left. Bill called me in when I knocked. His face was very pale and he looked like a frightened kid. He was sitting on the davenport. His right knee was all bandaged up.

"Sit down, Ward," he said. "Lola didn't have to call you. I'm all right."

I sat. There was a bottle of beer, still cold, on the table. I helped myself.

"All kinds of fire," I said a little sarcastically. "Can't you stay away from it?"

He didn't smile.

"Not when I can't see it," he said.

I sat there and stared at him. After awhile he got up and limped out into the kitchen.

"Come out here," he said.

I went out. It was a small kitchenette with a sink full of dirty dishes, a gas stove and a set of cupboards built in all along one side.

Bill was standing at the sink staring out across the roof tops from the single wide window.

"It's turning into a hell of a mess," he said simply.

Somewhere in my mind a lot of stuff was circulating. Bits of superstition that I had picked up here and there around the world. Stuff that I didn't dare put together, because the answer would have proven pretty gruesome.

"What's turning into a mess?"

He whirled around suddenly.

"Worth's burned last night," he said bitterly. "I was standing here in the kitchen when it burned. I wasn't near the stove. I lied to Lola about that. I think she knew I was lying."

"I don't get it," I said. "So Worth's burned and you burned. You were tight when I left you. Probably lighted a match and put it into your pocket."

He looked sulky.

"You're a lot of help," he said. "Why don't you go fly a kite. I don't like the way you keep poking your nose in. Maybe you and Lola...."

I almost took a poke at him. Then I saw the hurt look in his eyes and knew he didn't mean that at all. He had a fight ahead and he wanted to face it alone.

"Look," I said. "I got a date downtown. I'll drop in later. Think you'll be all right?"

"I'll be all right," he said. He didn't look around. I went out quietly and closed the door.

I caught a cab and went down to Worth's. There were a few thousand people milling around in front of a block of broken show windows. The fire had blackened quite a section of

the store. You couldn't get in one side at all. Around by the men's section it wasn't so bad. The fire had broken out in spots. I found the window where the three dummies were looking at Bill's necktie. The one Lola had picked out for him. The three dummies were still smiling and studying that tie with glass eyes. Lola was in the window, just fixing things up. She smiled and waved at me. I stood there grinning and trying to pretend I felt like it. I didn't. Lola and a tall, dark-eyed Romeo had just pulled down the canvas they had been working behind. The dummy that had been holding the tie was dressed in a new suit. The old pair of trousers were hanging on Lola's arm. *The right knee had been burned out.*

On the dummy's left hand was Bill's signet ring, the one he had shown me last night.

I WAITED until evening to see Sigmund Fones. I knew I'd have to corner him and pound what I wanted out of him. Maybe I was on the wrong track. I didn't think so. The listing in the yellow book was very neat. "Sigmund Fones—Your Future Revealed."

That's what I had thought. I was pretty sure that the dark young man I'd seen in the window with Lola had other business than window decorating. I took a cab out to the Seagrave Apartment Hotel, tipped the bellboy a buck to show me Mr. Fones's apartment door, then sat down in an easy chair down the hall a short distance. I looked at my watch. It was half past eight. I waited.

While I sat there, I tried to make sense of what had been happening. Number one—I decided the ring on the dummy's hand meant something.

Something that wasn't good. Number two—Bill had a bad burn on his knee, a burn that hadn't been caused by fire, at least not directly. Number three—Lola hated Bill and was playing around with Fones.

The elevator door opened and I sat up. A fat dame got off and went waddling past me, flirting like a ten year old as she went by. I stuck my tongue out at her and got a kick out of the way her breath sucked in with sudden indignation. The second elevator came up. A slim, dark-suited man came along the hall and turned the key in the Fones apartment door. I stood up and said:

"Mr. Fones?"

It was. He turned with a pleasant smile and said:

"Yes? Have you been waiting for me?"

I went over and shook hands and told him I had a dead grandmother who had promised to contact me after she died, and could he help me establish contact?

He smiled, opened the door and motioned me to go in. Behind me, he said,

"I'm afraid you misinterpreted my advertisement, Mr....?"

"Mr. Wilder," I said, and added, "Mr. Alfonse Wilder."

That made it good.

He snapped on the light, and I saw a large, rather exotic looking room with a hunch of rugs and divans all tressed in for local color.

"Well, Mr. Wilder," he went on, "I'm concerned largely with the future and not the past. However, I'd be glad to give you a reading. We often find ourselves able to cope with the future in a more favorable manner if we know in advance what to expect."

I didn't want to act too smart.

"Don't I know it," I said, and let him take my coat and hat. I still wasn't sure of myself. Fosse had a good set-up all right. Plenty of dough, too, from the look of things. "I'd a saved myself a lot of time with a blonde last year if I'd a known in advance the babe was engaged to a sailor."

Fosse laughed. It wasn't really much of a laugh. I think he'd have liked to give me the shake-off.

"Well," he said. "Supposing we get down to business. I have an engagement in an hour. If you'll sit down, I'd like to ask you a few questions"

He seated himself in a low chair and motioned me to place opposite him on the davenport. He reached over and drew a crystal ball from a cabinet beside the chair. The man had all the trimmings, but I hadn't expected such oom as this.

I noticed the strong, determined jaw, the dark skin, the black, searching eyes. Fosse might be putting on an act for me, but he knew his way around.

"Now," he said, looking up. "Tell me a little about yourself."

I grinned.

"No, you tell me about you," I said. "It's more fun. For example, how long have you been going with Lola Williams?"

I saw his long body go rigid, the eyes narrow. Then he smiled.

"Perhaps that is none of your business, *Mr. Wilder*," he said.

"And again, maybe it is," I said. I had my knees flexed, my feet well braced. "For example, I'm not as dumb as you might think. I've managed to grasp, in my childish mind, some connection between a certain window dummy, and a very good friend of mine who suffered from a mysterious burn last night."

I think that shook him a little, but I couldn't be sure.

"Then I assume," he said, "that if you are so clever, you certainly cannot hope to gain anything more by talking to me."

Sometimes I get awful mad at myself for having an Irish temper, but Fosse was smooth—too damned smooth.

"You start talking," I said, "or I'll knock that well-combed head of yours right off your shoulders."

He smiled mockingly.

"Try it," he said.

I did. I came out of that chair with every muscle in my body fighting for first place. Then from the door I heard a little cry of anger. I was stabbed in the shoulder blade by a bit of red hot lead. I wheeled half around to see Lola Williams standing there, the small pistol smoking in her hand, a dark, brooding look on her face.

"You're a fool, Ward," she said.

I knew it then, but it was too late. The room got very dark and the davenport jumped up at me. I sank into the darkness of the cushions.

FUNNY, how good I felt until I tried to move. I opened my eyes and looked up at the familiar, corner-to-corner crack in the ceiling of my room. I blinked two or three times and tried to make the crack go away. There shouldn't be any cracks in the plaster of Heaven. Or didn't I make the grade?

I turned my head slowly and I was in my own room. I moved one arm and felt burning pain in my shoulder. I managed to get out of bed and by holding a chair and pushing it ahead of me, I got to the mirror. My face was a mess. It was dirty and streaked with three days growth of beard.

Three days? Startled, I rubbed one

hand over the tough, scraggy whiskers. Yes, it had been at least three days since I'd shaved. I pulled up the shirt to my pajamas and turned half around, searching for the bullet wound. A neat bandage, securely fastened in place by a lot of half inch tape, was the only reminder that Lola Williams had shot me.

I got on the telephone and called Bill Williams. He sounded happier than he'd been for weeks.

"Ward, where in the devil have you been? We've been trying to phone you the good news."

I groaned.

"Good news from you would be a real morale builder," I assured him. "Where's that witch-wife of yours?"

Bill chuckled.

"Listen," his voice sank confidentially. "Everything's all right, see. Lola and I have made up. We're going on a brand new honeymoon. Going up to Lake Laroon for a month. Lola's a honey."

That left a sour taste in my mouth but I didn't tell him it did. I said: "Sure—sure. Good luck. Say, what day is this?"

He paused, and I guess he was thinking that if I was insane he'd better humor me.

"Wednesday," he said. "You're a lary..."

I hung up. Wednesday. Monday night Lola had shot me. She hadn't wanted to get into trouble. Neither had Fonce. They had taken me to a doctor, had me fixed up, brought me home and seen me out of danger.

That meant one thing. They didn't want me to interfere with their plans, and they didn't think I'd come out from under the dope until it was too late to do any harm.

I dressed in record time, shaved with cold water, and grabbed a cab

for the Worth store. I knew what I wanted. I headed for the men's-wear display.

* * *

SO FAR, so good—or maybe not so bad. The display was gone. A new one had taken its place. That meant that Bill—or Bill's dummy, the one with the burned knee—was somewhere on the loose. I had to find it. I thought I knew where to look.

I checked up on Mr. Sigmund Fonce by telephoning his apartment.

"Sorry, but Mr. Fonce checked out last night," the clerk said.

"Could you tell me where he was going?"

I held my breath while the clerk gibbered in an off-stage whisper with someone near the phone.

"The elevator boys says Fonce said he was taking a few weeks' vacation at Lake Laroon," the clerk said.

I forgot to thank him. I hung up, then dialed Bill.

"Listen, Ward," he said, and there was anger in his voice. "Lola told me about that pass you took at her a few nights ago. Leave Lola alone, understand. She's thinking straight now, and you can leave us both alone."

I wanted to swear at him, but I couldn't. I choked something out about okay, if that was the way he wanted it, and hung up. I stood there in the phone booth wondering what the hell to do next. Lola had sure fixed things up.

I went around to a bar and had a few shots. Then I tried Bill again.

"Is this the Williams residence?" I asked in the most dignified voice I could dig up.

Bill grunted, and I went on.

"This is the personnel department at Worth's. May I speak to Mrs. Lola Williams?"

I knew Bill was still angry and was sticking around Lola like a pet pup, but at last he let her come to the phone. I started to talk fast.

"Listen, Lola," I said, "Bill thinks that Worth's is calling. Pretend that you're talking to the floor manager or someone."

She recognized my voice.

"Oh," she said with genuine surprise, "Oh, Yee. Yee?"

It was good—very good.

"Listen," I said, "Fonse is hooked. I came out of the coma a little while ago. I sent the police after Fonse and they picked him up just as he was leaving for Lake Laron. Get it that far?"

There was a tremor of shock in her voice, but she spoke her lines perfectly.

"Why yes, I believe it could be arranged, Mr. Nolan," she said. "Go on, please."

Bill must have been at her elbow.

"I'm mad at Fonse," I said, "But Lola, I'm not mad at you. You know how I feel. *If it wasn't for Bill!*"

I hesitated, then went on before she could break in.

"The police are after you. Fonse got scared and tipped them off. Get Bill out of the apartment for an hour. When the cops leave, pick up and clear out before they come back. I'll stall them off."

* * *

I HUNG up. I knew she would bluff it out on her end and I had to get a cab—in a hurry.

I had a hunch that Lola wouldn't go far from the apartment. She'd suspect a gag of some kind on my part.

I caught a cab. Three blocks from the Williams apartment, I saw a cop standing on a corner. I motioned for the driver to pull up and I opened the door.

"Officer," I said, "My wife is very

ill. She tried to call and evidently dropped the phone. Will you come up with me? It's only a short distance. I may need help."

He was an Irishman, red-faced, and a decent guy. He jumped in and started to swear at the cab driver for not getting under way faster. We made quite an official looking team when we went into the entrance to the building. If Lola was watching from the restaurant across the street, she saw an honest-to-God cop walking in with me.

We reached the second floor and I knocked. No answer. Lola had given me a key two years before. I found it in my case and opened the door. I turned to the cop.

I tried to act very ill at ease and embarrassed.

"Officer," I stammered, "my—my wife isn't exactly—sane. She has these little spells. Perhaps it would be better if you didn't see her unless it's necessary. Will you wait?"

His face colored.

"You mean the lady's nuts, mister?"

I nodded.

"She—goes about without dressing properly," I said "Imagines that she's Lady Godiva, or something."

He waited outside reluctantly.

After a minute, I started talking to my imaginary wife, then went back and thanked the officer.

"Everything is okay," I said. "Thanks for coming up."

I closed the door after he started back down the hall.

The room was full of trunks and bags. I opened them as fast as I could, plunged my hands into each, then tried the next. In Lola's wardrobe trunk, I found the dismantled dummy, every piece present, every piece wrapped in tissue paper.

I was worried sick. If they came back before I could complete the

job, I'd be in an awful mess.

I found the hand and slipped Bill's ring off it. Then I found the head. Someone had done a damned clever job of painting Bill's likeness on that head. It grinned at me in full color. It could have been Bill himself.

I shuddered, rushed the head into the kitchen and went to work. The paint job had been done with water colors. I washed everything off, dried it and put it back into the trunk.

A key turned in the door.

I went back across the room at full speed, through the kitchen and out the back door. I hurried down the fire escape and met my Irish officer at the bottom. This time he wasn't grinning.

"So you got a crazy woman up there, have you?" He didn't sound very happy about the whole thing. "So you think I'm swallowing a story like that? Come along with you, now."

I planted my fist against his chin and pushed. When he managed to get his feet under him again, the back of his pants were covered with mud and I was half a block away, ducking into an alley. Both shots missed me by a good two inches.

* * *

THERE WAS a bad accident on the Lake Laroon road that night. A car driven by Mr. Bill Williams, the papers said, skidded off the highway into a deep ditch. Mr. Williams escaped with small injuries, but his wife's body was badly mangled. In fact, and the tabloids played this up big, Lola Williams was so badly cut up that not a limb of her body remained intact. She was crushed under the car and the steel body did a neat job of separating her into several sections.

It was a week before I dared to go see Bill. He had been staying at the

Hotel Wentworth, refusing to go back to the apartment. At first he wouldn't listen to me. Wanted to kill me with his bare hands. I just sat there and kept talking.

"Lola wanted you to be sent at me," I said. "If you had had time to listen to me, you might not have believed everything she said."

He kept staring ahead of him, fists clenched.

"Keep talking," he said grimly. "When you're done, get out."

"Okay," I said. "She and Fosse had been going with each other for months. Fosse is a foreigner, an Indian I think. He knew a lot of stuff that ties up with black magic. It isn't always as phony as you think. Fetish-cas seem to kill people in some countries. When the store burned, they had already chosen a dummy to represent you, and had placed a curse on it. Neither dared to kill you outright. They had a better way figured out."

He said nothing, but I know he didn't believe a word of it.

"The dummy's knee was burned the night of the fire. At the same time, your knee burned. You said you weren't near the stove."

That started him thinking. I saw his hand creep to his knee.

Lola packed the dummy in her trunk. Fosse painted your face on the dummy's head. That dummy was you. You were cursed. You were doomed to be cut up and decapitated as the dummy was.

"I got you and Lola out of the apartment. I washed off the face they had painted on the dummy. That destroyed the curse. The dummy was no longer you, but a meaningless mess of small parts.

"Fosse," I said, "was waiting at Lake Laroon for Lola. I can prove that. There is only one thing I can't

understand. Lola met the fate that was meant for you."

Color started to flow back into Bill's face. His fists relaxed.

"You say the dummy is in Lola's trunk?"

His voice was expressionless.

"It was," I said, "It still is if you haven't ..."

He stood up.

"I haven't," he said weakly. "I haven't had the heart to touch her things."

We opened the trunk together and started to lay the things out on the floor.

The head came last. When I saw

it, I understood why Lola Williams had suffered the fate planned for her husband.

She had packed a portrait of herself near the bottom of the trunk. By accident, the glass had been broken. Lola Williams' pretty face, printed on an eight-by-ten piece of paper, was folded tightly over the featureless face of the window dummy. The collection of arms and legs, tossed out on the carpet, were a horrible reminder of Lola Williams at the end, unveiled when the wreck of the car was hoisted from her broken body.

THE END

MANUFACTURED POWER

by B. R. NELSON

IT IS NOT generally realized that the majority of electric power generated in the United States comes from the burning of coal. Only about twenty per cent of electric power is generated by water power or oil burners. The rest comes from "black gold."

A trip through an electric power plant such as powers portions of a big city is a magical indeed. Most modern power plants all over the world are very similar in their general layout. Because they consume coal at such a tremendous rate amounting sometimes to thousands of tons per day, the plants are usually located, where possible, along the shores of a river or on a lake or anywhere where transportation of this gigantic volume of coal is cheap and easy. In addition, a source of comparatively pure water is needed. In the generation of electricity, the larger the plant, the more efficient, so it is common to see really monstrous plants. The coal is delivered to the power plant by barge, where it is scooped out by huge shovels or traveling cranes, and transferred to the storage piles. These piles are vast in size too because a power plant must always have a reserve of coal.

The coal is stored in flat piles and guarded down, carefully watched to see that no spontaneous combustion takes place. This is an ever-present danger that must be guarded against. Then some of the coal is transferred to a conveyor belt which delivers it to the hoppers in the furnace building.

The coal travels through the storage hoppers into a coal crusher which grinds it into a fine powder like flour. This powder is then blown into the furnace with vast

volumes of air. Some plants merely crush the coal and feed it into the furnace on traveling cranes. Every last B.T.U. of energy is collected in this way and coal is carefully analyzed the flow gases constantly, controlling the rate of flow of coal and air into the furnace, and by keeping the furnaces "clean" of fly ash etc.

The heat from the burning coal impinges on the boiler tubes where three hot gases convert vast quantities of water into steam at a terrific pressure and temperature. This high pressure steam then goes to the turbines which are connected to the generators. Automatic apparatus controls the speed with which the turbines turn and the generators are carefully monitored so as to feed electric power into the line in accordance with the demand made by it.

It is surprising how few men are necessary to run the plant. A few trained engineers watch the dials and meters and control the distribution of the power. A small crew of maintenance men is always ready for trouble. Probably the most numerous men are the coal handlers and with increasing mechanization, even they are decreasing in number.

Night and day, without ever a complete shutdown, an electric power plant keeps running. Only portions of it are shut off for repair and maintenance. Everything in the way of equipment exists in duplicate so that the instant a breakdown occurs anywhere, a replacement is available. Nothing is left to chance. Oil burning plants are even simpler and more reliable because of the ease of burning oil. What the atomic power plants will be like, is anyone's guess—all we want is plenty of power!

PORTABLE POWER — IN PLENTY

by CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

THE EDITORS of this magazine have bemoaned the fact, along with plenty of scientists and engineers, that there is no really good portable source of power. We long and we boast of the internal combustion engine—and in truth it must be admitted that it has changed the face of the world, but still it lacks all the elements of what might be. It is heavy, dirty, inefficient, complex, requires large amounts of fuel and is general as far from what you'd expect of our sanitary civilization.

Of course the answer to all our problems lies in the electrical side of the picture. We've dreamed about electric automobiles and planes, hoping to see the day when some storage plant is invented.

It's a funny thing, but in most cases, we've had the storage facilities before the engine. Coal comes before the steam engine and oil comes before the internal combustion engine, and all we need to store these fuels is bins or tanks. But the electric motor came before the storage of electricity which hasn't come yet. We have electric motors which are marvels of efficiency and simplicity and small size, but we don't have any way to store the juice. Yes, there is the storage battery, which is a filthy gadget, just as bad or worse than steam engines or gasoline engines.

A short while back we ran an article on the condenser for storing electricity. This naturally is the natural storage device for that elusive fluid. But of course it holds so little that it is impractical. We told of the hope held out to us by the discovery of certain dielectric materials which have an enormous capacity. Those are coming and the day will arrive when we can buy kilo-

watts and kilowatts in nice compact packages.

The other possibility, even more remote, of giving us a huge supply of electricity depends on first the development of a small portable atomic pile—which is far away, admittedly. Furthermore, some means must be found of making it deliver juice directly! This is a scientist's nightmare, but at the rate applied sciences is progressing it is a dangerous thing to predict any thing. Usually these traits are obsolete in a hurry.

Several physicists have commented on how nice it would be if one could just have two big condensers coming out of an atomic pile, and tapping us with all the current at whatever voltage we desired.

So we go back to the original thought, the development of a storage device for electricity which will pile it up in terms of hundreds of thousands of kilowatt-hours. With the new dielectrics this is far from inconceivable. Already condensers are made for certain applications with gigantic capacities. True these capacities still must be multiplied a myriadfold before they make us store electricity within reach of our natural cases. But that time is coming—and fast. Actually in discussing these matters we have not gone beyond the realm of natural science. So we still have that picture to play with. It is possible (but not probable) that someone may come along with a principle totally unknown to us, a principle of such gigantic influence that it might affect the whole of science and lead therefore to a new means of mobile or stationary power—we hope!

COMING NEXT MONTH

LEE FRANCIS'

"COFFIN OF HOPE"

Beyond the ice barrier of the south pole lay a mystery that meant more than man had ever dreamed before. It was a coffin but the strangest coffin in which "hope" was ever buried . . .

DON'T MISS IT — ON SALE MAY 10TH

SUPERMEN

By GEORGE GRAUMAN



She halted in the doorway and began to scream. There on the floor before her lay two bodies.

INCORPORATED

What weird thing was it that made automotons out of human beings and what was it that made Felix Land seem something more than human?

THE GIRL screamed with monotonous regularity. She sounded like an opera singer heard from the lobby; you missed the softer notes and got just the screeches, except that when she sucked in her breath before each prolonged shriek she sobbed in a heartbroken way.

Her face and figure might have been those of an opera singer, too. Her thick hair was a priceless poem in rich auburn done by nature without benefit of beautician. Her face and figure left nothing to be desired.

Her eyes were large and expressive, the lashes and eyebrows just right. Only now there was something wrong with her eyes. They held—not terror, but deep unquenchable grief and despair.

Her arms hung limply at her side as if in her emotion she had completely forgotten them. She was wearing a trim business suit of pastel blue. A suitcase lay on the floor where she had dropped it. The old style paneled front door behind her was open.

Flies drifted lazily above the two bodies on the floor, or lit on places that were not nice to look at.

From the look in the girl's eyes you knew this had been her mother and father.

Suddenly she stopped screaming and ran shakily to the old style wall phone. Cranking frenziedly for a few seconds, she lifted the receiver and kept shouting for the operator until

she realized there had been several responses.

Then she talked rapidly, pleadingly, and finally commandingly. She let the receiver drop instead of putting it back on the hook.

Her eyes seemed to have filmed over as she walked unsteadily past the two bodies and out the front door.

* * *

Felix Land was as impressive as his car, a latest model iridescent red Cadillac sedan with deluxe trimmings.

His six-foot-four was mostly legs—legs that had always carried him just ahead of his competitors in track meets all over the country. But nature had been kind to him and given him shoulders to match his height.

The clothes Felix wore had that something called class.

His eyes flashed briefly to the dashboard to make sure he had taken the car key, then he slammed the door and crossed the sidewalk in two easy four-foot steps that placed him in the doorway of the local drugstore. As he entered the shady interior, he heard the wail of a siren begin a few blocks away.

He seated himself at the counter of the fountain and gave his order to a friendly girl of sixteen whose eyes told him frankly she would cancel all other dates if he said the word.

The siren grew tired just outside, gave a short wail of defiance, then drifted off to sleep.

Two men came in through the door. They wore police uniforms. One of them stayed in the doorway with his hand on the butt of his gun. The other advanced firmly across the creaking floor.

"You Felix Land?" he asked.

Felix turned partly and noticed how the officer stayed clear of the space between him and the man at the door. He noticed the holsters unflapped, the look of half fearful expectation on the faces of the two men.

None of this awareness showed in his face as he answered.

"Yes," he said, his perfect teeth flashing in a disarming smile.

"You're under arrest," the policeman said.

"For murder," the man at the door added.

"Murder!" Felix exclaimed. Then he chuckled. "Don't be silly."

He turned back to the counter.

The two policemen looked at each other for moral support. It was a tough spot. Felix obviously didn't look like a murderer. All they had to go on was a garbled, almost undecipherable message over a loudly humming party wire. Still, the word murder and Land's description together with the words, red Cadillac, were enough. The policeman nearest Felix pulled out his automatic and pointed it at him, while Felix watched him through the mirror on the wall.

"You could be mistaken, you know," he said without turning.

"No funny business," the policeman warned, touching Felix's shoulder blade with the muzzle of his gun. "Just stand up and march ahead of me."

He directed his voice at his partner.

"John, get out your handcuffs and put them on him when he gets to the door."

Felix shrugged resignedly. Whatever this was about, he evidently wouldn't find out until he was safely locked up. They were too afraid of him.

With a wry smile he held out his hands to the policeman at the door. The man slipped the cuffs on him hastily.

There was a small crowd on the sidewalk. Their eyes were round and unblinking as Felix marched into the street and climbed into the police car.

THE JAIL was hot. The cell they placed him in had a southern exposure with no shade trees. The red brick walls soaked in the direct rays of the blistering sun and then bathed him in their bread-baking heat.

The forlorn toot of a passing train drifted through the heavy bars of the open window as he paced back and forth in the narrow stretch of concrete floor between the double-decker cot and the bars that separated his cell from the vacant one next to it.

They had locked him in with unconcealed relief and not a word of further explanation, taken the cuffs off when he stuck his wrists close to the bars, and then departed.

Now, for two hours, there had been no sound except the occasional muted motor noise of some car and the toot of a diesel locomotive as it sped past a few blocks away.

Felix sighed loudly. The situation was beginning to be irksome. The chocolate malt he had ordered would be nice. The girl had been a natural telepath. Maybe he could get her to bring it over.

He tried. She heard him all right; but like most natural telepaths she didn't know her gift. She told herself what she was hearing in her mind was her own thoughts. She flashed him a caressing thought that made

him blank, then ignored his further protestations and buried herself with pelishing the marble counter of the fountain. He gave up.

People were clustering up the loose board steps of the jail house. Felix went to the bars and looked toward the front door. He couldn't quite see it from his cell.

He heard it open and slam against the wall unchecked. Famine his heels were clicking down the hall. They were followed by the clump of heavier feet.

His eyes widened in surprise when he saw the auburn hair.

"Marna!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, those stupid policemen," Marna exclaimed, turning to give them an accusing look as they came up behind her.

Felix looked piercingly at Marna. In the two hours and a half since he had dropped her near her parents' farm she had grown haggard.

One of them silently unlocked the cell door and swung it open. Not until then did he look directly at Felix. His look was apologetic.

"Sorry," he said. "All we had to go on was what she said over the phone. We couldn't take any chances."

"What is it, Marna?" Felix asked.

The question seemed to bring it all back to her. She clenched her fists at her side and bit her lip.

"Mom and Dad have been—murdered."

Her self restraint broke on the last word. She half turned toward the wall, bringing her hand up to her face to hide her grief.

Felix took a step toward her, then hesitated, a look of misery on his face. She could have turned to him. The fact that she preferred to keep her grief to herself was something he could not help.

He gave the policeman a questioning look. Clumsily the man told him what they had found.

Mr. and Mrs. Grana, Marna's parents, had been killed sometime during the previous night. It seemed to be the work of a fiend. Their bodies had been horribly slashed with a knife.

* * *

HE APOLOGIZED again for arresting Felix and added that Marna had thought she was making it clear that she just wanted them to stop him as he went through town so that he would come back.

So her first thought had been of him!

Felix turned and took hold of Marna's shoulders gently. She let him guide her unresistingly, and had regained her composure by the time they left the jail.

"We'll see you at the farm," Felix threw over his shoulder to the policemen.

Marna walked firmly beside him as they went the four blocks to his car.

There was still a small crowd there, looking at his car and talking among themselves. One of them saw him and pointed. As he and Marna came up they drew back silently.

They were still there when he pulled away from the curb and started down the street.

"Poor Marna," he thought without speaking. He looked at her briefly, then turned his eyes back to the road. Too bad she wasn't a telepath. It was a barrier between them that held them apart. For so much of his life mental impenetrability had meant reserve and hostility that his every instinct made him shy away from her even though he knew by every sign that she held him in high regard, if not love.

He had never told her of his telepathic sense and how her will acted on him. To her he was just an ordinary person in that respect; one of the several thousand students who attended the state university along with her.

She could not suspect that he was different. His build was not too different to seem alien. And if it did at times all she had to do was look into his human eyes and see him smile to destroy the impression of minor differences in his body.

He drove slowly, curbing his impatience to learn what it was all about with his own eyes. This drive was mostly just to give Marna a chance to get a good grip on herself for the inevitable ordeal with the police, newspaper men, and worst of all, with herself.

The long nose of his Cadillac turned into the driveway only a hundred yards ahead of the sedan carrying the police.

He sat in the car, making no motion to open the door for Marna. Might as well let the police do their work without interference.

"Felix," it was Marna's voice, low and husky with grief. She stopped.

"Yes, Marna," he prompted softly.

"I want you to go in and look," she finally said. "There's something strange. I don't know what it is, but it's there. Maybe it's the way they are—cut up. I have a feeling maybe you can figure out why. The police will just call it the work of a monster and I don't believe it is that."

"All right," he said slowly. "You stay here."

When he got out of the car she hadn't looked up. He turned and went into the house. When he stepped through the door the police watched him expressionlessly.

The two bodies still lay as Marna had found them. Their clothes had been ripped off by the cutting strokes of the knife. They were nude except for the few tatters that still clung to their skin, glistened by the drying blood which was now a dull brown in places.

On Mrs. Crane's body the gashes were clean and thin, as if the knife had been searching for something, but hadn't found it.

Mr. Crane's body was different. The gashes were there, almost as profuse as on his wife's body but thick slabs of flesh had been cut out of one side and also out of the leg on the side, just below the hip.

Felix walked to the other side of the bodies and saw that similar chunks had been cut out on the opposite side.

The heads of both the man and the woman had been crushed by something heavy, wielded with terrific force.

He frowned, but said nothing. The police were busy dusting for fingerprints.

Felix put his hands in his pockets and looked around the room. He had never been here, nor had he met Marna's parents.

THE ROOM was a typical farm parlor with its papered walls, high ceiling, old fashioned wall board and doors and fir floor. Judging from the room the house was about thirty years old, perhaps less.

The curved glass doors of the combination desk and bookcase showed the ordinary collection found on farms. Worn school geographies, unread classics, and two or three man-handled photograph albums comprised the lot.

A chair over near the kitchen door was overturned. The thin rug was

turned up and wrinkled near it. The lamp on the table was all of glass. The storage part was dry of kerosene and the chimney was black with soot, showing that the lamp had been burning until it ran out of oil.

His eyes kept returning to the places on the man where the chunks had been cut out. That was what Marna had meant when she said there was something strange.

What was the reason for that? He forced himself to examine more closely. It took a supreme effort of will. Insides had fallen through the holes in the sides of the abdominal cavity. The intestines had not been cut.

All the gashes had been simply swipes of a sharp knife except a cut from the vacant place in the side and the hole cut in the side of the leg. There the cut seemed to have been made carefully and with many starts and stops. It was almost as if the wielder of the knife had been following something under the skin, careful not to cut into it.

Felix got down on his knees and bent closer. Now he could see something that he had missed before. Spreading out from the vacant place on the leg was a series of faint scars.

They were so thin and white that they had not been noticeable from a standing position. They were very curious scars. Almost as if a surgeon had peeled back the skin over a wide area for some reason years ago.

From the lengths and positions of the scars the center of the area had been just where the large chunk of muscle tissue had been removed.

There were similar scars on the skin around the wound in the side.

Felix rose and walked slowly to the front door. Outside, he took several deep breaths. His skin was pale under the smooth tan.

Marna was still in the car. She watched him as he walked toward her.

He got in the car without speaking. The frown on his face indicated intense concentration. Marna watched him curiously, waiting.

"Tell me about your father," Felix finally asked. "Was he ever in an accident? Did he ever have a serious operation?"

"No," Marna said. Then a flash of memory came over her face. "Oh! I was trying to remember during my life-time. Before Mom and Pop met each other he had been a cripple for several years."

Her face softened at the memory of what she was about to say.

"Mom said to me one day that she fell in love with Pop when he was still in a wheel chair. He must have loved her too, she always insisted, because he was free and easy with everyone but her. He would scoot around the block to avoid her."

Marna sniffled, then held her head up defiantly and went on.

"Pop had injured his spine in a rodeo and was paralyzed from the waist down," she said "The doctors told him the nerves were permanently damaged and he would never walk again.

"Then one day he went away without telling anybody about it. A year later he stepped off the bus, as good as new. You know how news travels in a small town like Kingfisher. He hadn't walked a block before a clerk in the dry goods store had seen him and called Mom up and told her.

"Practically the whole town was on hand to watch when she ran down Main Street and threw herself into his arms."

Marna cried quietly for a bit. Felix pulled out his handkerchief and wiped a tear from his own eyes.

"You know," Marna said softly, "It's funny in a way. Mom and Pop knowing they loved each other that way, yet never speaking to each other while they spoke to everybody else. Always avoiding each other. Then when his legs were healed they didn't need to say anything. I guess the whole town knew it as well as they did."

"Who operated on his legs?" Felix asked.

"He never told anyone," Marna answered simply. "I asked him once when I was little and he told me—"

A look of mystification came over her countenance.

"I hadn't thought of it since I've grown up," she went on. "But now that I think of it, what he said was very strange. He said—I can almost hear him saying it now—'God sent an angel to me in a dream and told me to come to him and I would be healed and walk again. In the dream I told the angel I didn't have any money to go where she said. Three days later the money came in a letter, so I went; and God made me so I could walk again.' Then I asked him what an angel was. It puzzled me because in Sunday school they taught that an angel was a spirit. This was his answer: 'an angel looks like a very good man except that his legs are very long, like a young colt's, and he is very very tall—much taller than a man, and very wise.'"

Marna looked curiously at Land's knees where they stuck up above the dash board. Her eyes traveled to his short body and his broad shoulders, his high intelligent brow.

"The description would fit you, wouldn't it Felix?" she said with a wan smile.

Felix tensed. A worried light appeared in his eyes. He forced him-

self to relax, driving the tension out of his muscles, one by one, as he had been taught since before he could remember; then driving the thoughts rushing through his mind into the background of consciousness.

Marna watched, aware that something strange was going on. She saw his eyes become fixed and glazed. His breathing slowed until it was imperceptible. This was a Felix she had never seen before, nor guessed.

He remained that way for several minutes. When he awoke he shook his head violently as if shaking himself awake. When he looked around it was as though he were recalling where he was after having forgotten.

THEN, WITHOUT appearing to be aware of her, he got out of the car and went into the house. Almost at once he came out again, one of the detectives following him.

The detective was talking rapidly. Felix cut him off with a curt gesture.

"Be sure you do what I said," Felix clipped. "If you don't you will answer to me when I get back."

Then he was in the car, a grim look on his face, gears clashing as he backed the car around and headed toward the road.

The tires skidded as he turned into the dusty country lane and viciously switched into high gear. He was going seventy within a quarter of a mile, his face straight to the front, his lips a grim line of worry and determination.

Marna propped herself as best she could in the swaying car, trying to frame a question which the wind tore out of her mouth before the words could be formed.

At the intersection with the state highway there was a service station. Felix slid to a stop and curtly or-

acted the tank filled. While this was being done he lifted the top and raised the door windows.

In the midst of this he handed Marna a thermos that had been lying in the back seat and asked her to get it filled in the station cafe.

Obediently she took the thermos and did what he requested. She could ask questions when they were on the road again. Evidently, wherever they were going, he wanted her along. Suddenly she realized that she didn't want to be left behind. Whenever Felix went she wanted to be with him. Nothing else mattered right now. She shut her mind to everything else.

She bought some sandwiches with the coffee, just in case. When she went back to the car, Felix was taking the change for the gas. He grinned his thanks for her promptness and had the car moving almost before she was seated.

The car headed north, the needle of the speedometer hovering just over eighty most of the time. Felix showed no inclination to explain where they were going, or why. She was so happy that she felt a warm glow all through her body. Although she did not know it, she was suffering from shock and her feelings were abnormally exaggerated in their effects.

Some dim spark in her subconscious had given her something to cling to and forget for the time being the sight of her mother and father as it had started into her mind when she first walked into the farmhouse.

If Felix was aware of this condition he gave no sign. He held his eyes to the highway, taking risks that would have left Marna gasping if she had seen them.

It was growing dark when Felix stopped again for gas. The sandwiches and coffee were gone.

The grim look in Felix's eyes had dimmed somewhat. He asked Marna if she wouldn't like some more coffee with a dish of ice cream while the tank was being filled. Her nod was automatic. When he led her into the cafe she walked like one in a dream.

Afterward the car passed through the small town and picked up speed, the headlights boring a hole in the darkness as the car hurtled through the night.

Neither talked. Marna cried for perhaps fifteen minutes once, quietly. But when they pulled into the third gas station she was humming a tune absentmindedly, her eyes holding a faraway look.

The dashboard clock said two forty-five when Felix nosed the car off the road through an open driveway gate. High brick walls were on either side of the drive. The gate was of dark ornamental ironwork.

The driveway curved among trees and bushes for several hundred yards before coming to a garage. There were three sedans parked in front of the two car garage, substantial antennae going up through their roofs. On their polished sides were the letters, STATE PATROL. Underneath it was the seal of the state of Missouri.

"Stay here," Felix said curtly. His voice sounded almost harsh.

HE CLIMBED out of the car and went toward a state patrolman who was approaching. He took the man by the arm and spoke to him in a low voice, without slowing his pace.

"My father—is he dead?" Felix asked sharply.

"No," the man answered. "There's no sign of him. No sign of foul play either. The Oklahoma police told us to wait here for you and to look out

for trouble until you came and told us what it's all about."

Felix took the front steps in one felina glide. The patrolman hesitated, then returned to his post.

The house was a mansion-like structure built by a man to whom money was no problem. The front door probably cost as much as an ordinary house. Double, each door ten feet high and four wide, they served as frames for works of art in leaded glass.

Felix had no time for these now. He pushed open one of them and went in. Inside, several highway patrolmen rose nervously from the depths of luxurious chairs. One of them tried gallantly to hide a cigarette like a man caught smoking in church.

With a redecorating job the huge front room could have been transformed into a church. The twenty-thousand-dollar rug would have had to be taken out and replaced by something cheaper. The fortune in exquisitely carved furniture would itself have paid for a cathedral any congregation would have been more than proud of. And the grand piano could have been traded in for a pipe organ with a little cash thrown in.

The room itself was at least thirty feet wide and sixty feet long, stretching up into the shadows of the vanished rafters and crossbeams of the roof.

"Are you sure he isn't here?" Felix demanded as he came in.

The officer in charge shook his head. "We found three mice in the basement, a spider in the garage, and a cockroach or two in the kitchen," he said dryly. "I doubt if we could have missed a man even if he was trying to hide from us."

Quickly Felix sketched what had

happened at Kingfisher. He closed by saying, "I think the murderer or murderers came here first and either killed my father or kidnaped him."

"Why?" the patrolman asked, puzzled.

Felix hesitated before answering.

"Because the murderer could only have found out about Mr. Crane through my father," he said slowly. "You see, it was my father who operated on Mr. Crane twenty years ago."

"But what has that got to do with it?" the patrolman asked amazedly.

He was too late. Felix had turned his back and begun a search of the house for himself.

He pushed through a doorway into a rear hall and strode swiftly along its length to a smooth panel door. This opened into an operating room.

A surgeon would have viewed this room with some surprise. To the unskilled eye it seemed just an ordinary surgery; yet there were differences.

When the highway chief reached this room in pursuit of Felix he saw him searching through a filing cabinet.

"What has that got to do with it?" the man repeated, half exasperatedly.

Felix continued his search of the files unheedingly. He said, "Hm," once, and whistled softly several times when his rapidly moving fingers paused momentarily before flicking to the next card.

Finally he pulled a blank card from the file and wrote several names and addresses on it. The addresses were in several cities within a radius of three hundred miles.

He handed the card to the patrolman.

"Notify the police to get out to these people and guard them if they

are there, and report what they find if no one is at the address," he ordered.

"But—"

"There's no time to waste," Felix said earnestly. "The life of any one of these people may hang by a thread at this very second. Seconds count. Tell the police at those cities that if everything is all right they must get out of sight and guard the place twenty-four hours a day until this is cleared up. They may catch the killer if they don't bungle."

Felix looked at the patrolman and took pity on his bewilderment.

"Do this right away," he said. "Then I'll tell you a little of what it's about."

"Okay," the man said. He turned at the door. "But it better be good or you're in trouble."

THE DOOR closed behind him. Land's shoulders sagged. His face looked grayish in the light of the fluorescent tubes and his eyes were feverish.

Suddenly he remembered Marna.

She was still sitting in the car where he had left her. Her eyes stared off into the darkness at the side of the garage.

Impulsively Felix opened the car door and lifted her out. She put her arm around his shoulder and he carried her into the house to a deep divanport facing the fireplace. Its back shaded her from the lights in the room.

He slipped off her shoes. She smiled slowly, then closed her eyes. He watched her broodingly for several minutes, turning away only when the patrolman to whom he had given the list of names came back in from the cars.

"All right," the man said. "Pellor are on the way out to every one of

those places. We'll get the reports from them starting almost any minute now. Will you please tell us what it's about?"

"I can't tell you everything," Felix said in a low voice. "But I'll tell you this much: the operation my father performed on each of the people on that list, and on Mr. Crane, involved a secret that could prove almost disastrous to civilization if it got into the wrong hands. Does that make sense now?"

The patrolman blinked several times.

"It does," he said. Then doubt crept in. "But how could an operation be dangerous to civilization?"

"How would you like to feel your legs moving under the control of something outside yourself?" Felix asked. "How would you like to see the face of an innocent man before your eyes, and your hands moving of their own accord about his throat, squeezing his life out while you fought to relax them? How would you like to hear your voice saying things dictated by something outside yourself, feel your lips smiling calmly while you tried hopelessly to scream the fact that it was not YOU who were doing those things?"

He looked blankly at the staring faces of the listening men for a moment. Then he turned away from them.

"You mean—?" one of them asked.

Felix turned abruptly to face them again.

"Yes!" he said. "That could be done by an unscrupulous person with the technique of that operation. You see, so many people are hopelessly paralyzed because of damage to the nerves. The nerves are dead at a certain spot so that nerve impulses from the brain don't reach the muscles they are intended to set in mo-

tion. My father was humanly foolish. I mean, he knew this and felt it his duty to help them. He—ah—invented something to bridge the gap between the dead end of the nerves and restore the old channels."

"Oh," a patrolman exclaimed. "That accounts for the missing chunk of flesh. By dissecting that, the murderer can see how it was done and then do it himself."

"No," Felix said. "You see, it wasn't exactly an operation in the strict sense of the word. There was no way to reconnect the nerves. The nerves were atrophied and would probably be impossible to find anyway, let alone segregate and reconnect properly. What my father did was implant a set of wires made of a special alloy that would bind to muscle and tissue without festering. These took the place of the lost nerves and were activated through a small gadget directly from the mind! This gadget operates by telepathy and is imbedded near the paralyzed muscles. Then the patient is taught how to control it. He learns to walk, or use his arms and fingers, until he is just as good as he ever was."

Felix stared bitterly past the men listening to him.

"It is that gadget and the secret of that alloy that the murderer is after," he said slowly. "If he gets it he can plant it in his victims' bodies and control the telepathy center himself, making them do what he desires."

The patrolmen looked at him, understanding growing in their eyes. Incredible! Yet they had all read the report sent by the Kingfisher detectives: Two approximately three-pound chunks of flesh missing from the legs of the man, and two similar areas on the sides of the torso also stolen.

Unless it were the work of a san-

nial there could be no other explanation than the one they had just heard.

* * *

MARNA LAY quietly listening to what Felix said to the state patrolmen. Her eyes were closed and her figure relaxed. Yet in her condition of shock her hearing was super-sensitive and her mind overactive.

The words, spoken in a low voice, had seemed slow, each syllable prolonging itself. She had dwelt on the expression and emotion that lay hidden in the sounds.

She had not missed the pause before the word, invented. She had not missed the tone that implied Felix was prevaricating on that word. Her mind voraciously dwelt on the implications. She tried to harness those thoughts without avail.

What did it all mean? She felt that Felix was talking the truth up to a certain point, and that any falsity was merely for the purpose of concealing something he was not at liberty to reveal for some reason.

She resigned herself to the fact that she could not cut off her thinking and go to sleep. It would be better to let her thoughts ramble and perhaps try to direct them.

If Land's father had not invented the mechanism he implanted in the flesh, who had? He had used it because he was humanitarian. Undoubtedly he had traveled around and seen a few cripples like her father had been.

When he found one, he played the role of God, spiriting them away to this paradise and keeping them here until they could face the world, whole once more.

The other thing Felix had said—what was it? "My father was humanly foolish." That implied so much;

too much. It implied alienness. It implied that he shouldn't have cured the helplessly paralyzed. Why?

Felix had never been anything but kind and human. The statement sounded strange coming from him. Almost as if he didn't approve of his father doing that kind of good.

What kind of a reason could a good person have for disapproving of such a great good as healing the helplessly crippled?

He had given an answer to that when he said the mechanism could be used to enslave a person as well as restore them to health. Yet that didn't really hold water. Drugs enslave people, yet they are a boon to mankind in alleviating pain when properly used.

That mechanism was dangerous only if kept secret. Suppose it were well-known and in common use? Then enslavement would be very hard, and very easy to prove when it did occur. A man who committed murder under the compulsion of one of those things could prove it by the presence of the thing in his body.

A man who acted strangely could be arrested and examined to see if the thing were there. Of course abuses would come. They did with everything.

THERE MUST BE SOME OTHER REASON FOR THE SECRECY.

Felix Land's father hadn't invented the thing. He had learned it from someone else. Also he was very rich if the house was any indication.

Felix was a perfectionist. She had never known him to do a clumsy thing or make a clumsy remark. The house, from what she had seen of it, was the architectural planning of a perfectionist.

Land's father must be a perfectionist.

MARNA SHOOK her head, trying desperately to cling to her line of reasoning. She had been trying to think of something constructive. What was it? The elder Land was a perfectionist. What did that have to do with the murder of her own mother and father?

The blankness of her mind made her feel thwarted. Maybe if she got up and walked around she could recapture her train of thought.

She opened her eyes. It was broad daylight. A blanket had been thrown over her and drapes covered all the windows. She had been asleep!

No one was in the huge room. She called for Felix. No one answered. Panicky, she jumped from the day-enport and ran toward the nearest door repeating his name in a shrill voice.

The door opened before she reached it. A man with a bright yellow skin pulled taut over thick layers of fat stood in the doorway smiling and bowing, his black satin trousers and coat wrinkling in an unpretended way with each bow.

"Felix is asleep now," he said, his voice enunciating the words without a trace of foreign accent, but in a singsong tone. "You would like coffee perhaps? Before you bathe?"

Marna pulled up short, stifling a scream that had welled up at the first sight of the man.

His eyes were extremely large with almost an exaggerated slant to them. They were a bluish green, rather pale, the whites clear and brilliant, the irises enormous.

He seemed to exude friendliness and harmlessness. When he stopped bowing he remained in a half bowing position as if ready to begin again. His expressive face reminded her of a dog looking for a sign of affection. It was impossible to resist him.

"Thank you, yea," she said, smiling with real warmth.

"I bring," the oriental said, bowing low and backing out of sight through the door.

He reappeared almost immediately with a tray of sterling silver. The cup and saucer were of an exquisite Spode pattern, blue glass with a raised gold pattern and elaborate handle on the cup.

He paused before a chair and looked at her half questioningly and half pleadingly. She walked over and dropped into the chair.

With a pleased chuck he pulled up a small table and set the contents of the tray on its polished surface.

She sipped the hot black liquid with a crooked, pleased smile half hidden on her lips. In spite of herself she felt like some oriental queen being served by the mysterious slave.

He seemed to sense her thoughts. Grinning broadly at her, he backed away and then turned, to vanish again through the door to the kitchen.

A transparent plastic cigarette box rested on the small table at her elbow. She lifted the loose cover to get a cigarette. The cover seemed too heavy for plastic. She decided it was glass.

But glass didn't have the refractive richness of this piece.

Her eyes searched the room near her and settled on the glass top of a coffee table. She pushed back her little breakfast table and rose.

At the coffee table she scratched one corner of the lid of the cigarette box along the glass surface. It left a deep groove.

Thoughtfully she returned to her chair and replaced the lid after taking a cigarette and lighting it from the match folder laying on top of the cigarettes.

If it had been—not the top to a box, but a small gem, she would have

unhesitatingly pronounced it a diamond. Its lustre and ability to scratch glass testified to that. But a cigarette box!

There must be some other explanation.

She drained her cup and stood up. The oriental must have been peaking, for he opened the door at once and came in.

"Your bath is ready," he said in his singsong and with his eternal bow. He held the door open invitingly.

It opened into a hall and ran parallel to the wall of the room she had been in. He padded ahead of her, stopping at an open door that revealed a modern tiled bathroom of restful, clean orthid. She stepped past him and he softly closed the door.

She locked it. She did that by twisting a small knob above the large knob. Beneath there was a keyhole without any key in it. She took off her suit jacket and hung it over the knob, covering the keyhole.

The vision of the oriental coming in at just the proper moment to scrub her back, an obliging, apologetic smile on his face, was so ludicrous that she chuckled.

While she bathed she tried to decide what nationality he might be. She brought to mind the features of all orientals she had known.

Somehow he didn't seem to belong to any of those nationalities. It was his eyes. Their coloring, size, and shape didn't fit. They might be abnormal—probably were. There was a woman in Kingfisher with abnormally large eyes. She was part English with a twenty-fourth Cherokee.

Perhaps Land's father had taken the man on as a servant in an attempt to heal his eyes. She remembered vaguely reading someplace that the abnormality was caused by pressure

behind the eyeball, which pushed it out.

The large pupil could be caused by dope. Some drugs dilated the pupils.

The tub was large and comfortable, the water just right. There was a faint scent to it as if it might be perfumed. The soap lathered easily. Soap bubbles floated against her on the orchid water.

She climbed out of the tub completely refreshed. Then she noticed for the first time that a complete change of clothes had been laid out for her on the dressing table.

They were her own. Felix must have put her suitcase into the car last night at the farm without her knowing it.

The memory of yesterday and the farm brought back her grief. Suddenly she wanted Felix to wake up and join her. Her fingers trembled slightly as she dressed. She bit her lip hard, and the pain helped her get a grip on herself.

Felix was in the front room when she went in. The sight of his tall, capable body gave Marna a feeling of security.

He flashed her a smile and asked her if she had had a nice sleep, then turned again to the highway patrolman who was talking earnestly to him.

* * *

AS MARNA had fallen asleep on the davenport, the sun had been coming up when the first calls came in over the two-way radios in the patrol cars. Of the six names Felix had written on the card for the police to investigate, five were reported not at home. The sixth had been taken into protective custody. The whole thing had been explained to him and he had been quite willing to spend a few days in jail after being assured

he would get all the comforts of home and more.

The police in the five cities where the other five addresses were, left guards posted to await the return of the people on the list—four men and one woman. Reports had been promised as soon as anything developed.

A statewide alarm was out for Land's father and his abductors.

Nothing more could be done. Felix walked over to the davenport where Marna lay. She was asleep. A muscle just under her eye was twitching.

Pity for her welled up in him. He bent over and softly kissed her cheek. Her eyes half opened. She smiled dreamily and raised her hand, touching the spot where he had kissed her.

"Good night," Felix whispered.

"Good night," her voice was a low murmur.

Upstairs in his room Felix determined to try again to contact his father. He could not believe him dead, yet if he were alive and conscious he should have answered his son's mental call at the very first try.

Felix unlocked a cupboard and took out two things. One was a flattened sphere of silvered glass set on a rotating shaft. The other was an album of phonograph records.

He selected one of the records and put it in the radio-phonograph near his bed. Then he hung the sphere on the light fixture on the ceiling over the foot of his bed.

He started both things, undressed, and climbed into bed without bathing. Two pillows under his head lifted it so that he could look directly at the rapidly spinning silver sphere.

The voice from the loudspeaker, strangely enough, was his own. The words, however, were in a strange language, fluid and musical.

When the record had played through, it started again almost with-

out a perceptible break. Even after his eyes closed the soft voice droned on, hypnotically.

An hour passed. The voice stopped and was followed by a loud click from the speaker. This seemed to be a signal to the sleeping man.

His eyes opened abruptly, but otherwise he didn't move. Minutes passed while he lay there motionless.

He had placed himself in a hypnotic trance in an effort to contact his father. He had succeeded almost immediately. Now he was remembering it.

First he had concentrated on the rotating sphere. Its rapid motion gave a quivering effect to its light. He had gone through the routine he had learned in childhood from his father.

Concentrating on the bright object he had banished, one by one, all the thoughts in his consciousness, until the sphere began to grow. It grew until his imagination conceived it to occupy a vast space—the universe itself.

Then he had let his mind interweave the words from the loudspeaker with the gigantic sphere of bright silver.

Rapidly, through long training, he lost all sensation from his body. New things crept into his awareness. A sensation of freedom from his body swept over him. New senses came into dominance.

Then he sent out his call.

His father was unconscious, yet he answered. He was alive! That much was certain. By direct questions Felix got the story. He could get it no other way since his father's mind was passive in unconsciousness.

There was little he could get. Yet, the yellow-skinned slave, had retired to his apartment over the garage for the night. His father had been at the piano.

Suddenly the door had burst open. There were two men with hint-nosed automatics. He had never seen either of them before. While one of them had held him at revolver point, the other had walked around behind him. Since they were both non-telepaths he had been caught unaware.

He had felt a heavy blow on his head, then blackness. He was still out.

Felix sighed. He would have to wait until his father recovered. Even then there was little hope that his father could tell him where the two men had taken him.

The back screen door slammed. That would be Yat. Felix put on his bathrobe and went downstairs. The police were questioning Yat in the kitchen. Felix added his questions.

Yat, very bewildered, knew nothing. He had retired at his usual time. He had been unaware that anything had happened. He had slept soundly and awakened at his usual time.

After Felix nodded his consent Yat led the police to his apartment over the garage and allowed them to search it unhindered.

They were very excited about the equipment in Yat's apartment until Felix explained that it had been used for a laboratory for experiment before it had been done over to accommodate Yat.

With the police satisfied and Yat acquainted with what had happened, Felix returned to his room. He was asleep when he hit the pillow.

IT WAS eleven-thirty when he awakened. He hurried downstairs. Marna was up, but not in sight. He went to the front door and called to the men left on duty in the one remaining patrol car.

One of them came in and gave him the news of events while he had slept.

Of the five missing people, one of

which was a woman, three had been accounted for. Two of the men had been located at the houses of friends upon information given by neighbors in the morning. The woman with her husband was touring the country in their automobile, and had been gone for three weeks. A nation-wide dragnet was out to locate her and acquaint her with the danger.

That left two men unaccounted for. "George Tremont of Kansas City and Harry Tract of Chicago," Felix said thoughtfully. "George Tremont came here two years ago and Harry Tract came a couple of months later. They left at the same time—last summer. George had been a lumberjack in Washington until an ax cut into his leg. The leg healed, but the nerves were severed. He had been crippled for ten years and his leg was quite withered. I remember him when he left. He could use the leg, but he hadn't learned his lessons too well. He dragged it too much and still looked like a cripple.

"Harry was the most difficult job of all of them. He had been a pianist of some note. Got into a mess with some man's wife and the man got even by severing the nerves of the right arm. Not intentionally though. He had intended killing Harry, but muffed it.

"It was all in the papers. Right after, it came out that Harry hadn't been running around with the man's wife. She had accused Harry when she was caught so that the real culprit wouldn't be found out.

"It appealed to my father. He contacted Harry and brought him down here."

Marna came in from the hall, her skin fresh looking and red from the brisk toweling she had given herself. She came over and hooked her arm in Land's without interrupting him.

Yat bustled in and began setting the long table for breakfast.

"I did a lot of thinking after I went to bed," Felix continued. "I think this whole thing must have been started by some one of the people my father had here as a patient. They were all sworn to secrecy, and my father investigated each of them as to character and extent of good that could be done, and rejected hundreds for each one he chose.

"Yet one of those must have either told the details of the operation to some other party who saw the potentialities of the thing, or be decided to get the thing himself."

"Have you any definite suspicions of which it might be?" the officer asked.

"No I haven't. But I'm sure the only lead we have to the killer is through one of those two men, George Tremont of Kansas City, and Harry Tract of Chicago."

Yat brought in coffee.

The officer went out to the car. Marna sat down to another cup of coffee and there was a determined glint in her eye.

"Felix," she said, "I—"

"Yes!" Felix prompted, sampling his coffee appreciatively.

"Don't think me rude," Marna went on, a worried look on her face. "Maybe I'm just being romantic or too imaginative. This servant—his name is Yat? He doesn't seem to belong to any nationality that I know of. You, yourself, seem to be just a long-legged ordinary person, yet there have been times when I thought there was something strange about you. Then when I remembered what my father told me when I was little about an angel with long legs healing him; the money your father sent without having even met him; this house; the wonderful operation; the way you

hesitated before saying your father invented it—like you were telling a white lie to cut off any further questioning on that score...."

"Yes?" Felix said, a queer smile on his face. He was not eating now. His hands rested on the spotless linen tablecloth. His eyes were piercing in their fixed gaze.

Marna dropped her eyes in confusion. There was an embarrassing silence. Finally it was broken by Felix. His voice was gentle.

"Marna," he said. "Sometimes life plays unfair tricks. Do you know what honor is? Honor is the foundation of all society. Without honor men couldn't work with one another. Without honor marriage is a farce. Without honor man is less than a beast, because even beasts have their code. I know the answers to all those questions you just raised. I know what you are thinking. I can't answer a single one of them without violating a trust far more sacred than...."

"Then what?" Marna challenged.

"Then life," Felix said. He turned his eyes away.

"Oh," Marna whispered. She raised her tear-brightened eyes to look at Felix.

Yet stood just behind him, his shiny yellow face unsmiling.

"You will tell her," he said. "You would break her heart on the day she loses the only other two she loves in a horrible death because of your honor. Yet your honor did not prevent you from letting her love you. And you love her. I can see it in your mind. Tell her."

"No, Yet," Marna said hastily. "He doesn't need to tell me. Really he doesn't. There is such a thing as trust as well as honor. I trust him, so he doesn't need to tell me anything."

"Trust should work both ways,"

Yet said. "Tell her, Felix."

"No," Felix said, his voice full of anguish.

"Then I will!" Yet said decisively. "I have no honor," his face softened, "only devotion."

"You would violate the code?" Felix asked woodenly, his face a mask.

"For you and—her," Yet said slowly.

Felix remained motionless. The air was full of tension. Marna found herself holding her breath and slowly expelled it. The pounding of her heart made her quiver.

Felix sighed, a long shuddering intake of breath. Then his eyes lifted and caressed Marna.

"Very well," he said quietly. "I'll tell her."

Yet turned abruptly and padded into the kitchen.

Felix lifted a piece of toast and bit into it slowly. Marna smiled as if nothing had happened and asked him to pass her the jam. Her voice quavered noticeably, but Felix seemed not to observe it. They ate for several minutes in silence.

WHEN FELIX spoke his voice was calm and impersonal, almost detached.

"It's impossible to tell anything without telling too much," he began. "The little I tell will leave so much that you will insist on knowing that you would really be better off puzzling over what you think you don't know now."

His eyes looked into hers piercingly, then dropped to the table. Into the momentary silence the voice of a mourning dove came, its note sounding loud.

"I was born on Venus."

Marna heard the words. Their

meaning seemed impossible. He had said it like another man might say he was born in Los Angeles.

"My father," Felix went on, "is a resident observer. That is, he lives here, keeps up on current events, and reports to Venus on world affairs. If you're wondering why, if this is true, Venus hasn't made itself known and established relations with the people of the Earth, the reason is not very flattering to the people of the Earth. It's because Earth is considered too barbaric, her nations and civilization too unstable.

"We've had resident observers on the Earth for over a hundred-thousand years," Felix went on. "The reason has been more than just to observe things here. We knew that eventually the Earth would master space travel. When that time comes we must know whether she should be received with open arms or repelled."

"Then that explains why your father—?" Marna asked.

Felix nodded.

"Possessed of a tremendous humanitarian instinct he could not idly watch people go through life crippled when he could fix them up. At the same time the means of doing it was so potentially dangerous that he could not give it to mankind. Even if it weren't dangerous, we are sworn never to give the world anything new. Our inflexible policy since the beginning has been not artificially to advance Earth's progress. In the long run that might be more harmful than good. Earth might reach out to Venus before she is truly civilized and have to be pruned back."

"It seems impossible that Venus could have had resident observers on the Earth for a hundred-thousand years without at least one of them being discovered and the truth re-

vealed," Marna exclaimed. "How do you know I won't give your secret away?"

"Would you be believed?" Felix asked with a dry chuckle. "Anyway, I don't think you could do such a thing, Marna. Take the present danger. It's just an example of what could happen if the science of Venus came to Earth now. There are too many people who would see and use the criminal possibilities of our science. The gadget my father used to restore mental control of muscles where the nerve connections are destroyed can also be used to shut out the brain itself and make the body subject to the control of another mind while appearing to be normal."

"You're right," Marna admitted. "Is Yat from Venus also?"

"Yes," Felix said. "How do you like him?"

"I don't know," Marna said. "When I first saw him I thought he was a harmless, rather comical oriental. When he talked a while ago before he went back to the kitchen I saw depths I hadn't seen before. I think he could kill a man while he was bowing and smiling at him, without a change of expression."

"You're right there," Felix said with a short laugh. "Marna, I must go to Chicago for a short time. I doubt if the police will be able to uncover this thing. It's a job for us Venusians, anyway. Our headquarters in the United States are in Chicago. Will you stay here while I'm gone?"

"My mother and father—" Marna said, a cloud coming over her face.

"Oh yes," Felix exclaimed contritely. "Look. There's an extra car in the garage. Suppose you drive that back to Kingfisher and use it while you are there."

THE MAN glanced briefly at the board beside the back of elevator. His eyes came to rest on the line that said BRISBANE DETECTIVE AGENCY 1163. Then he stepped into the already overcrowded elevator and squeezed back far enough so the doors could close.

He took the flat package he had been carrying under his arm and held it close to his chest.

A scedy-looking, hennsed female of fifty-some years was trapped between his shoulder blades and the crowd behind her.

Her two glittering, veined orbs with their washed-out pupils fixed hypnotically on the quarter-inch of fine copper wire that stuck out of the man's neck just above the collar on the left side.

At eleven there was a small sign on the wall opposite the elevator door that had the numbers 1150-80, and an arrow pointing to the right.

The man put his flat package under his arm again and started down the hall. The woman in the elevator watched him until the elevator doors cut off her vision.

In front of 1163 the man paused hesitantly, shifting the package from one hand to the other. Finally he gripped it firmly with the fingers of his left hand and reached for the door knob. Opening the door a few inches he slid the flat package through and let it drop on the floor.

He closed the door quickly and started back down the hall toward the elevator without a backward glance. Instead of taking an elevator, however, he walked up to twelve and went into a lawyer's office.

Giving the girl his name he sat down to wait. His grey suit, blue felt hat, black shoes and drab personality did not impress themselves strongly on the girl. She did not

notice the copper wire sticking out of his neck.

After a few minutes the buzzer on her desk rasped. She lifted the phone and listened.

"There's a Mr. James Cartwright to see you," she said briefly. When she hung up she spoke politely to the waiting man. "Mr. Curtis will see you in just a moment."

"Number please," the petite blonde at the telephone exchange said.

"Get police inhalator squad to 1163 at the one-sixty-five Erie building," a weak male voice gasped. "Poison gas. Hurry."

The blonde heard a sharp explosive sound as the phone hit the desk at the other end.

She contacted the police as quickly as though she had seen the man collapse.

The desk sergeant got that call first, then the call from 1164 from an excited secretary who said someone had thrown a whiskey bottle through the glass of the door to 1163.

Then the call came in from the flower shop on the ground floor asking him to send an ambulance. Glass and a heavy book end had hit the sidewalk. Several people were injured and one man was undoubtedly dead. The bookend had crushed his skull.

"Darned fools," he muttered as he connected with the radio room.

* * *

THE "darned fools" were dead. It looked like there had been a convention going on, because there were fifteen of them, including the secretary. Some of them were still sitting in the folding chairs and office chairs where they had been when the flat package dropped just inside the door with a dull plop. Others were in various positions on the floor,

indicating they had tried to do something in a hurry.

The man with the copper wire sticking out of his neck calmly joined the huddled group in the lobby and answered promptly when the uniformed policeman asked him his name and address and why he was in the building.

The sooty woman came down a few moments later. When she spied him she kept her eyes on him suspiciously. The tragedy had occurred on the eleventh floor, that piece of copper wire might be stuck on the man's skin from some kind of a bomb, and that man had gotten off on the eleventh floor.

When the policeman asked for her name and address she saw her duty.

"Officer," she whispered excitedly. "I'm sure I know who did it. Don't let any of these people go, and take me to someone in authority so that I can tell them."

The officer sized her up and discounted what he saw. Still, he couldn't take a chance. Without another word he led her to an elevator with a policeman standing in it and ordered him to take the woman up to eleven and get one of the homicide detail to listen to her.

Fifteen minutes later the elevator came down with a man in a business suit who slowly surveyed the crowd and finally settled on the collar with the small bit of copper wire above it.

Walking over to the man he flashed his badge.

"Hold still a minute," he said in a friendly voice.

Reaching up, he took the wire between his thumb and index finger and yanked sharply. The yank dragged a good two inches more of the wire into view.

With a muttered exclamation the detective scratched his fingers away,

his eyes fixed in horrified surprise on the redly glistening length of the fine wire.

A drop of blood oozed up around its base and crept along to where the wire dipped down onto the collar.

Then the man with the wire in his neck did a strange thing. He looked around, panted. He acted just as though he had never seen the surroundings he was in before.

Next a worried expression appeared on his face. He put his hand to his chin and appeared to be in deep thought.

A frown of irritation replaced the worried expression. He reached up to his neck and started to scratch the spot where the copper wire stuck out. Then he took the wire in his fingers and yanked. It came all the way out this time.

He looked at it dumbly and dropped it to the floor, rubbing the spot on his neck where it had been.

For the first time he seemed to become aware of the staring people around him. It embarrassed him. Hunching his shoulders to make himself as obscure as possible, he walked toward the exit.

Ten minutes later he was the central figure in the mystery, outshining even the fifteen bodies in the office on the eleventh floor and the man side on the sidewalk with his skull crushed in.

The man didn't know who he was, how he had gotten into the building, or why he was there.

Since the policeman who had taken the names of the people in the lobby couldn't remember which of the names belonged to him, a roll call had to be made to find that he had given the name, James Cartwright.

* * *

FELIX LEARNED about it on the noon news broadcast. The sport-

ment in which he was staying lived with his own home in regal splendor. It was the apartment kept for visitors by the regional director from Venus in one of the most exclusive districts along Lake Shore Drive in Chicago.

He immediately went to the phone.

The man at the other end of the wire sat at a desk in a large wholesale concern. He might have been mistaken for Felix's brother, so alike were they. His name was Fels Bardow, with the accent on the dow.

"Did you hear the news broadcast just now?" Felix asked.

"Yes," Fels replied. "Looks like we'll get action at last."

"I was getting tired of waiting after two weeks of it," Felix said dryly. "I can't say that I like the price of action, though. The entire staff of the detective agency we hired is wiped out if the news report is true. What in the world possessed them to all get together at once like that?"

"That's unimportant now," Fels said bitterly. "We have to get that man, James Cartwright, some way. We'll have to operate and restore his memory and find out a few things. Right now we know nothing."

"We've got to do it quick, too," Felix said. "If we don't, the police will call in doctors to examine the man. They might operate and learn the technique of causing amnesia. That would be a terrible bit of knowledge to add to the things the human race on Earth already knows."

"It certainly would," Fels cut in. "The doctors would write up an article about it and put it in some medical journal. Imagine the next world war with all the prisoners on each side made into amnesiacs and re-taught; sent into battle in a few weeks against their own country

indoctrinated with a suicide complex. We've got to get that man."

"But how?" Felix asked. "There's another thing. I don't see how whoever is behind all this could know the technique of producing amnesia."

"Look at the facts," Fels said dryly. "Imagine yourself a policeman and you have just centered your attention upon a suspect in the murder of fifteen people. You see a small piece of copper wire sticking out of his neck. You don't think of the possibility that it goes into his neck. You yank at it. That is elementary psychology."

"To produce amnesia that wire would have had to be hooked under a vertebrae and run into the cerebrum to the right spot and—" Felix said.

"Yes," Fels cut in. "It all points to something we never thought conceivable."

"I know what you're thinking," Felix said. "But how could a brown man escape to the Earth? There has been no report of one escaping."

"It has to be a brown man!" Fels said. "It all adds up. The brown men of Venus are the only ones having the surgical skill to do what was done to Cartwright. If they were not hereditarily insane they would be the greatest race in the solar system."

"You're forgetting something," Felix said. "If it were a brown man, he wouldn't need to steal those gadgets my father used to heal cripples. He could make his own."

"Where would he get the supply of element one-seventeen for the grid receptor?" Fels objected. "You know they haven't learned how to synthesize elements higher than ninety-five on Earth yet."

"That's right!" Felix exclaimed. "The only way he could get it is to steal it from us, and the only one of

us that has any use for it is my father. He only orders what he needs."

"There you have it," Felix said. "Look at the way your father has been kept unconscious since his capture. An Earth man would not have done that. A brown man would know that as soon as your father regained consciousness he could contact you and tell you where he is."

"Let's get down to cases," Felix said. "We've got to get at Cartwright. He's our only lead now. What do you think we should do?"

"Do this," Felix said. "Go to the police. Tell them that you engaged the entire staff of the Brisbane Detective Agency to find your father. Tell them you believed that Harry Tract was the strongest possibility to your attempt to solve the killing of Marma's parents and the abduction or killing of your father. All that's the truth. They'll check on it. They might be a little sore that you didn't come to them first, but hired detectives instead. Throw a little emotion around if they show that they don't like that. Tell them that since Cartwright is the strongest lead so far, you intend to hire the best doctors to try to find out what happened to his mind."

"Okay," Felix said with relief. "Maybe they've found something in the Brisbane office that might give us a lead or two also. The report of one of their detectives on Harry Tract might be it."

"That's a possibility," Felix said. "I'll get on it right away. So long."

HE HUNG up at the same instant he heard the noise behind him.

The man standing in the center of the room was at least six-foot-six. The most peculiar physical feature was the roundness of his entire head.

At first glance it seemed a ball; with hair, eyes, nose and mouth painted on its surface.

His shoulders stuck out from his body so that his arm pits formed inverted U's instead of V's. That gave him a somewhat grotesque bodily appearance since his chest was thick and wide.

The skin of his face and hands was a rich, smooth brown. His jet black hair was neatly plastered to his head in a center-part pompadour.

His ears and nose were delicately formed and flawless in their chocolate shading. On his lips there was a dry smile.

It was his eyes that revealed the immense power of the mind. Large and a deep brown, they seemed almost flat in shape. They held a light of incredible mental forces at work; a light so strong that it struck Felix with almost a physical force.

Felix had never seen a brown man in the flesh although he had seen many pictures of them and even a moving picture or two in color. He realized now that no mere picture could portray the hidden power of a brown man.

With the shackles of his neck rising and his lungs bursting from the pressure of the air he had sucked in at first sight of the figure and was now unable to release. Felix steered himself to look into those calmly baleful brown orbs. He looked and his soul shuddered at what he saw.

The schizoid mind of the man looked out at him, its seven consciousness centers in harmony for the moment in their common hate of him. Felix dimly sensed more consciousness centers, asleep for the present.

With his knees feeling like rubber, he forced himself calmly to appraise the mind of the brown man. It was

an experience few men dared to gain and never cared to repeat.

There could be no complete analogy. It was like a team of telepaths who have worked in close harmony for years until they could engage in common thinking among themselves in perfect harmony, discussing their activities without benefit of spoken word; so completely in one another's confidence that all mental barriers among them had long since disappeared.

It was like many cats tied together by their tails and hung over a clothes line unable to escape from one another, with each blaming it on the rest and trying to get revenge.

It was the evil and gargantuan splendor of hell and the awe-inspiring perfection of the complex machine in action; the evilness of a thousand nightmares, and the radiant power of a thousand suns; the stunning genius of mental giants and the terrible force of a hundred gorillas in combat.

It was madness so great that it warped the sanity to behold it, and when Felix pulled his mind away from the spectacle, it was like drawing back from the brink of an abyss of hell.

The lips moved and the brown man spoke for the first time, his voice as soft and smooth as the chocolate coloring of his skin.

"Bravo, little monkey," he said. "Few there are who can do that and retain their sanity."

Suddenly Felix was afraid. The fear came like pneumonia, suddenly. It began in the body and seeped gradually into his mind. First he began to tremble. Then he wondered why he was shaking so, and was unable to stop shaking.

Little fingers of fear reached stab-

bly into his consciousness. He fought them, then feared them. Rapidly fear engulfed him. He became an abject coward.

The fear crystallized gradually into fear of things. He thought with sickening horror of the brown man stepping forward and wrapping his arms about him. He quaked at the thought of those long, brown, sensitive fingers reaching to touch him.

He felt danger creeping upon him from behind, and feared to turn and look. And the shaking of his body became an independent force which he could sense only vaguely.

Without thinking he launched himself at the brown man, his lithe figure moving swiftly. Terror gave him the insane strength he needed.

Like something separate from him he dimly sensed the movements of his body. For one eternal instant he saw nothing but the smooth round brownness of the man's jaw. Then he felt a sickening stab in his hand that traveled up his arm.

The pain was like a cold shower of water that revived him. The fear left. He stared alternately from his bleeding hand to the inert form of the brown man on the floor.

An alarm gong kept pounding at his brain. He must hurry! He must tie this brown man up before he revived! There was no repel!

His eyes roamed the apartment wildly.

The venetian blind! With frantic haste he ran to one and pulled it up as far as it would go. Then with his pocket knife he cut the cord loose.

The pain in his hand made him faint and dizzy. The body of the brown man weighed at least three hundred pounds. Finally he got it turned on its back and the arms pulled together.

He sobbed with relief when he had

tied the last knot and stepped back, safe at last.

AT THE phone once more he listened for the dial sound, then held the phone down while he dialed Fels' number.

He cursed monotonously when he found he had the wrong number. On the third attempt he heard Fels' welcome tones and hastily told him what had happened. Then he paced the floor nervously until Fels arrived.

When Fels came in the door he took one look at the trussed figure and whistled in amazement.

"How did you accomplish that?" he exclaimed in awe.

"I don't know," Felix said honestly. "It was a terrible nightmare. Already my mind is beginning to blot it out. What are we going to do with him?"

"There's a problem," Fels said softly. "We can't turn him over to the police. We're skating on dangerously thin ice as it is. We've got to get him out of Chicago and send for a ship to take him back."

Fels went to the phone and dialed a number.

"Dr. Graves?" he said over the phone. He waited a moment then said, "Dr. Graves, this is Fels. Come over to the guest apartment and bring a good hypo with you. Hurry."

He started to hang up then thought of something else.

"And doctor," he said hastily. "Start thinking how you can get a man from here out to one of the landing spots without detection."

When he hung up he noticed Land's broken hand for the first time.

"You were having a nightmare," he said sympathetically. "Only extreme emotion could enable a man to put that much force into a blow."

Felix said nothing. Cold beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead like dew. Pain stabbed continually up his arm.

Dr. Graves bustled in with his best professional manner, then drew up short as though he had run into an invisible wall. He gave Fels and Felix each a brief glance.

With fingers that shook in their haste, he opened his bag and prepared a hypodermic injection. Only after it had been shot into the arm of the unconscious brown man did he relax.

"That should do him for at least eight hours," he said cheerfully.

Felix held out his right hand.

"You'd better come back to the office with me," Dr. Graves said after examining it. "It's going to be quite a job to set that."

* * *

MARNA hummed happily to herself as she packed her last bit of luggage. Felix had told her that she didn't need to take anything but an overnight bag because they would be wearing different clothing on Venus. She had answered that if the Venusians didn't like her in the clothes she was accustomed to wearing they could lump it.

He had laughed tolerantly and let her do as she pleased.

The elder Land, had lived up to her advance conception of him. White-haired, he looked every inch as she had pictured him. He hadn't been harmed during his captivity.

Soon after the capture of the brown man the effects of the drug used on him had worn off and he had contacted Felix by telepathy, guiding him to the place where he was prisoner.

Fingerprints of the brown man had been televised to Venus and it had been found that he was among those listed as dead. An investigation was going on to determine how he had

managed to escape from Venus without detection.

There were still a few sad undertones to the picture. Cartwright had been placed in a hospital under observation. He had grown steadily worse. A brain operation had disclosed the fact that one part of the brain was permanently damaged. It had been removed and he was reported recovering nicely, but he would never remember his past.

Marna's parents were cremated after a quiet funeral. Their deaths were still listed by the police as unsolved and would remain that way, since the facts of the case could not be given to them.

The brown man was waiting in a small mountain cabin in Montana, still under drugs, for the arrival of a ship from Venus to take him away.

The same ship would carry Marna and Felia. Mr. Land, with a quiet smile, had insisted that he could not permit his son to marry a woman of Earth until she had been thoroughly indoctrinated with the political ideology of Venus so that she would be immune to the communist ideology and the capitalistic newdeology.

Marna had laughingly countered by saying that we had done away with slavery on Earth, so in that respect we were ahead of Venus. When she said it she turned her mischievous eyes toward Yat.

"On Venus only slave can vote," Yat answered in his sing-song voice.

"Is that right?" Marna asked, turning to Dr. Land.

He nodded.

"You will find a very peculiar set-up on Venus," he said slowly. "For one thing, you'll find that an individual is not recognized as such under criminal law. For another, you'll find that the slave really has the

best of it. It's what might have happened in the United States if the south had won the civil war and the north had then turned to legislation for the betterment of the lot of the slaves."

Marna finished her packing and locked the last suitcase. Then she went to the door and called to Yat. He was sitting in a station wagon outside.

When he had carried everything out, Marna climbed behind the wheel and started the car. Yat glanced worriedly at his wrist watch.

"I know I took too long," Marna said. "But we'll make it."

She wove the station wagon skillfully through the evening traffic of downtown Oklahoma City and was soon speeding toward Kingfisher and the farm.

They reached it in three quarters of an hour.

As she drove the car around the barn to the edge of the alfalfa field, a silvery object appeared from the north. It grew larger rapidly, and when it came in for a landing the silvery color of the underside changed to a soft golden glow.

A farmer a half mile away saw it and watched curiously.

A RECTANGULAR section of the underside fell away and a short ladder dropped down. Yat worked frantically to haul all the luggage up to hands that reached down from the ship.

Then he took off his hat and smiled at Marna, his lip trembling. Impulsively he kissed him on the lips. Then she was up the ladder and entering the ship.

Almost before her feet cleared the ladder it was lifting back into the ship and the ground underneath was retreating.

Felix took her hand and led her to a seat. Then he sat down opposite her.

Almost at once the pull of terrific acceleration could be felt.

There were no portholes. Felix interpreted her glance at the wall of the compartment and pointed to a small gadget by the arm of the seat. Then he took the one at his own place and put it over his eyes.

Marna followed suit. Immediately she seemed suspended high in the air. By turning her head one way and then another she could see as if there were no ship.

It gave her an uncanny feeling to look down toward her lap and see nothing but the ground several thousand feet below.

Rivers and mountains crept from one horizon to the other in moments. a DC-4 appeared to be going backward, though headed in the same direction they were. It appeared in front and dropped over the horizon in less than five minutes.

Marna took the gadget from her eyes and looked at Felix with shining eyes.

"Are we on our way?" she asked excitedly.

"Not yet," he replied. "We have to pick up the brown man first. He's in Montana, you know; still under opiate."

A musical gong sounded luxuriously. The ship dipped downward slightly for the landing. Marna looked through the gadget again and watched the landing. Everything appeared dark on the ground.

Shadowy figures lifted a long, inert form into the ship. Then the ground retreated.

The movement of the ship seemed now to take on a purposeful air. In moments the light-studded darkness below grew remote. The horizon took on a rounded shape.

At last the sun rose above the horizon.

"I'll bet that's the first time you ever saw the sun rise in the west," Felix said.

The curved surface of Earth looked strange in the early "morning" light. It had a curious broken look to it, the cloud areas looking solid while the land and sea areas looked dark and empty.

The sky had lost its blueness. Lights were cold and sharp. The moon, for some reason, seemed smaller than it had on the surface. There seemed thousands of times as many stars.

Marna put down her viewing instrument. She was in the closed interior of the ship, its silence and solidness giving her reassurance.

"How long will it take us to get to Venus?" she asked.

"A little over three weeks," Felix replied. Then, seeing the expression on her face as she looked around, he added hastily, "Oh, not in this ship. This is just a shuttle boat. We'll reach the space ship in a few more hours."

"Oh," Marna replied, relieved.

SHE SEEMED lost in thought for several minutes.

"Lonesome for Earth already?" Felix teased.

"No," Marna said seriously. "I was just wondering about that brown man. He comes from a race of madmen, you say?"

"Yes," Felix answered. "I'll tell you a little of the races of Venus. On the space ship you can read it all in the library, but maybe a preview might be interesting.

"The original human race so far as we know was jet black. They were on Venus fifty million years ago at the

very minimum. Religion played an important part in the beginning of the other races.

"The occasional albino was considered cursed and was segregated into a part of Venus where the blacks didn't care to live. As the population of blacks grew, the number of albinos became greater.

"At first the albinos believed the theory that they were accursed by God. Then some genius was born who told them God had created them because He was dissatisfied with the original race. From then on they multiplied, killing all the black children born to them, and welcoming the incoming albinos.

"When the blacks learned of this new trend, they stopped sending albinos and killed them at birth, but they left the colony of albinos alone to develop as they wished.

"It couldn't have been worked more intelligently by a skilled breeder. The white race grew naturally from the succeeding generations of the original albinos. Filled with religious zeal and convinced they were the favored race of God, they taught each generation that it was their duty to multiply and expand. By war they took over more and more territory until they were the stronger race.

"Then they made their mistake. They made slaves of the blacks. The 'sinners' mated promiscuously with their slaves until the whole slave race had white blood mixed generously with the black. This mistake was 'corrected' by rigid laws. The infiltration of white blood stopped. But the third race was being born, and also the fourth. The third race was yellow. Yet is a modern descendent of it. They are still the slave race.

"However, in one province the slaves rebelled and killed off all the

white masters. It was so remote from the whites that no action was taken. The slaves numbered no more than three hundred. Family life was unknown. A female bore perhaps ten children during her lifetime from as many fathers. The result was rapid inbreeding which sapped the vitality of the stock and prepared the ground for easy mutation.

"Survival of the fittest played an important part in selection of the surviving mutation. In their case the fittest was the large and powerful but totally insane brown man.

"When science came to the white man on Venus, he explored the whole planet and found he could lick any race or tribe except the island of the browns. For centuries the browns were a thorn in the side of civilization.

"Their island was finally surrounded by a permanent patrol. Eventually this was replaced by an electronic wall which is still standing.

"Nearly two - hundred - thousand years ago space travel was mastered and the first colonies were formed on Earth. Everything would have gone fine, but away from the tradition of Venus civilization, the blacks, who had been forced to join in the expeditions, slipped away and were never heard from. Then the yellows revolted and formed a nation of their own, driving the whites away from the original colony.

"A space war ensued in which the yellows defeated the armed might of Venus. The white Venusians retaliated by destroying the continent stronghold of the yellows. By that time the yellows had spread to Asia. They had a hard time of it, though, and in the fight for survival against nature they had no time to retain their knowledge of science.

"The colonization of Earth was

given up as a bad job. The whites had migrated north and west from the original continent colony. The yellows had multiplied prolifically. The blacks had gone south and west into Africa and degenerated into small tribes of savages.

"Since then Venus has kept only small groups of resident observers on Earth, letting the forgotten past remain forgotten to the peoples of Earth.

"During the past century, though, we have begun to realize that the time is not far off when the secret of space travel will be discovered by the Earth races. Then we must decide whether we must fight for supremacy or risk the evils of free travel to our planet and the consequent dangers of war and criminal bands."

MARNA said, doggedly returning to the subject, "But the brown men, I always thought that insanity was more or less relative. Oh, I know there are nervous breakdowns. I know that you don't mean the brown men suffer from nervous breakdown all their lives. But if everybody in the community thought he was Napoleon then it would be normal to think you are Napoleon, and the 'insane' man would be the one who thought he might not be Napoleon!"

"I see what you mean," Felix said, laughing. "It's different than that. Let's take you, for instance. As far back as you can remember you have always been you. Right?"

"Yes," Marna answered. "Although I've often been beside myself, and my mother used to say when I was little that my worst fault was a habit of forgetting myself."

"There's never been anyone else inside your head along with you, though," Felix persisted.

"I wouldn't know," Marna an-

swered, a twinkle in her eye. "I've often had to talk myself into doing something, and I'm continually arguing with myself."

"I'll make it clearer," Felix said. "Suppose there were no one sitting here—I didn't exist in the flesh. Then suppose we were carrying on this discussion just the same as we are now, only instead of talking across the space between us, we were both inside your skull."

"That's a split personality, isn't it?" Marna asked.

"Exactly," Felix said with relief. "Now suppose instead of just a simple split personality you were a multiple personality with seven or eight distinct persons, so to speak, all inside your skull. That's how the brown race is from birth."

"But that just makes them insane from our standpoint," Marna objected. "From their own it is perfectly normal, isn't it?"

"No," Felix said positively. "Split personality is a mental disease. If everyone in the United States had leprosy from birth until death it would still be a disease wouldn't it?"

"Perhaps," Marna said slowly. "Perhaps not. Suppose that hair is not normal, from the standpoint of a totally bald race. Then this bald race would class hair as a disease and consider that we all have it and catch it from our parents. Maybe they could find some drug that would make our hair fall off. Then they would engage in a campaign to 'cure' us of that dreadful disease."

"I see what you mean, Marna," Felix said. "You are right, in a sense. The brown man differs from the split personality as it appears in the other races of mankind in that it is incurable and shows no organic cause. Just the same they are functionally insane."

"In the same way as our hyperactivity of the brain would be considered insane by the monkeys," Marna said. She was enjoying her argument with Felix.

"Maybe so," Felix said slowly. "It could boil down to that."

"Then they aren't really insane," Marna said triumphantly. "Not in the same sense that I would be if I were to become schizophrenic. Their multiple personality is a true mutation isn't it? Rather than a mental disease?"

"That's right," a new voice said calmly.

Felix and Marna turned in alarm. The brown man stood in the entrance to the compartment, a heavy automatic held comfortably in his hand, a calm smile of confidence on his lips.

FELIX reached to a concealed button and pressed it hastily.

"If you're signalling for help," the brown man said, "You're wasting your time. You two are the only ones able to move. I used the hypo and the drugs you so conveniently left near me. And I won't make the mistake of forgetting that the dose should be increased each time to compensate for the resistance the body builds up to it."

"So that's it," Felix exclaimed.

"Yes," the brown man answered. "For a week now I have been fully conscious when the injection was made. I was waiting until I was on a shuttle boat." He chuckled humorlessly. "You should have killed me instead of trying to take me back to Venus."

"Yes, you should," the brown man's voice altered slightly. "You underestimated Omni—that's the one of us who was just speaking. He's a smart one!"

"Oh, I don't know," the voice of Omni replied. Then he inserted in a tolerant tone of voice "That was Grohm. He's the artist of the body. Completely temperamental, but smart enough to realize he hasn't the stuff it takes to dominate the rest of us."

The brown man bowed slightly toward Marna.

"You were right when you said we aren't insane," the voice of Omni said with a smile. "We are actually a distinct improvement over the normal type of mind. The so-called normal mind is somewhat like us in some respects. You yourself would have a great deal of trouble if your seeing and hearing centers got all mixed together so that you could never be sure if the impulses they received were a sound or an image. Yet in your higher consciousness centers you are all mixed together. You only have one distinctly integrated higher consciousness center. If you acquire another you are slapped into a sanitarium as being insane."

He chuckled good naturedly.

"What do you plan on doing?" Felix asked tensely.

Omni looked surprised, then glanced at the gun he held speculatively.

"That's right," he said. "I should do something, shouldn't I? I can't just hold you at the point of a gun indefinitely or the shuttle boat will land on the skin of the space ship and then I'll be captured again."

His grin was taunting.

"No," he said absently. Then he glanced quickly at Marna. "That was Rorty," he explained. "He told me to kill both of you. I have something else in mind, however. I need hands to do my bidding. Lots of hands. You see, I need this ship. I need others

like it. Yes, you two will be a great help to me."

"If you think you can force us—" Felix began.

"Force you?" Omni interrupted with surprise on his face. "You know better than that, Felix. I only need to teach you."

His smile was calm and rather polite as he backed out of the compartment. When he closed the door there was the sound of a bolt sliding into place.

"What did he mean?" Marna asked hastily.

Felix shuddered involuntarily.

"You've heard of victims of amnesia who can't remember who they are or anything about their past?" he asked. At Marna's nod he continued. "He must know how to operate and produce artificial amnesia. The white race of Venus can do that and does do it sometimes. He must have learned how in some way. That man in Chicago proves that."

"You mean he would do that to us?" Marna asked, horrified.

"He just said so," Felix said.

"But—but—" Marna sputtered bewilderedly.

FELIX SAID, "I know what you're trying to put in words. It's a problem the greatest of Venusian psychologists haven't been able to answer. You're trying to ask if you will be you. If you are still you, you will only be your lower consciousness centers such as the senses and speech. You will be a passive tool who will listen to what Omni tells you and believe every word of it. If he tells you you are a robot and the human race is your enemy you will believe it and even be willing to die for that belief."

"How horrible!" Marna exclaimed.

"And will I remember all that when I wake up."

Felix looked at her a long time before answering.

"If it happens you will never wake up," he said grimly. "Now let's be quiet for a minute. I want to try to contact the ship by telepathy. That's one thing Omni overlooked. As long as he overlooks something, there's hope."

He leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. Marna watched his handsome, expressionless face intently.

His body relaxed slowly. She remembered a book or article she had read some time on how to relax completely. Felix seemed to be following the same procedure. In five minutes he looked as if every muscle in his body were loose and without the least bit of tension. He remained that way for several minutes more.

Marna felt the ship change direction and speed. She dragged her eyes from Felix and looked through the gadget that seemed to make the ship transparent. The Earth was directly ahead and growing larger. The brown man was going back to Earth!

When she looked at Felix again he had already opened his eyes. He sat there with a tired smile on his face.

"I made it," he said wryly. "They had seen the change in the ship's direction and were wondering about it—especially since we didn't reply to their radio."

"Then we'll be rescued?" Marna asked eagerly.

"Let's hope so," Felix replied.

He picked up the view scanner and looked through it. Marna followed suit. At first she could see nothing different than she expected. Then, far up toward the moon, she saw several stars that moved rapidly.

If it were not for their motion she

would have mistaken them for real stars.

The ship lurched slightly as it hit the denser atmosphere and slowed down to around two thousand miles per hour. The pursuing shuttle boats were lost to sight.

"Marna," Felix said. His voice was gentle, with a tinge of regret.

"What is it, Felix?" she asked.

"I'm afraid it will be all over soon," he went on. "You see, secrecy is imperative. It would be impossible for our ships to capture this one in the Earth's atmosphere without the act being visible to thousands of people. They would know that the ships weren't built on Earth. They would have time enough to get accurate descriptions of them. Maybe even some of them would be damaged in the fight and fall to the surface where they would be examined by the authorities. If our ships catch up with us they will have no choice but to annihilate this one. If they don't catch up with us, Omni will blot out the thing we must have to be really ourselves—our memory and self awareness and knowledge of who we are. So either way we are as good as dead right now. I'm sorry it had to turn out this way."

"Maybe Omni will put off changing us for awhile," Marna said hopefully. "Maybe something will turn up."

"There's one forlorn hope," Felix said slowly. "If Omni thinks you meant what you said about him not being crazy instead of the fact that you were just saying it to carry on a friendly argument—"

WRIGHT seemed to increase sharply. Felix looked through the view scanner to see if they were landing. It was dark out. As he looked, the ship slowed quickly, ap-

proaching a set of farm buildings that squatted diamally and mysteriously at the edge of a wooded hill. It seemed that the ship would overshoot its mark, then with terrific deceleration it came to a pause in front of the barn.

Lights went on and Felix saw that the conventional wide barn doors had been changed so that the entire end of the barn could be opened. The doors were sliding open now.

As they opened, he saw that the space inside had been made over as if in preparation for this type of ship. His eyes widened in speculation. It suddenly had dawned on him that perhaps Omni had let himself be captured, so that he in turn could capture a shuttle-boat!

He had been outsmarted at every turn by this madman whose mind was equivalent to the combined minds of several ordinary men like himself.

Grimly he realized what Omni was planning. World conquest! It could be nothing, less. With humanity on Earth under his ambitious thumb he could very well hold off any ships Venus might send. With the armed might of Earth he could set free the entire race of brown men.

While Venus believed him merely a dangerously insane brown man they had no slightest conception of the possible extent of danger facing not only the Earth, but Venus also.

If the Venusians couldn't find Omni, they might forget the whole matter in a short time, confident that Omni couldn't do much damage without Earth police catching him.

If he, Felix, were changed into a mindless tool of this brown man, who would know of the threat to mankind? Who would stop it?

A desperate frenzy settled on him. There must be some way of ending things. If only he had killed the

brown man instead of just knocking him unconscious in his apartment! If the chance offered itself again, he wouldn't hesitate.

He glanced ruefully at his right hand. The broken knuckles were knitting nicely under the paper-thin, flesh-colored cast.

There was a slight hump as the ship was dropped to the landing ring that had been built in the barn for just such a ship as this.

Marna looked at Felix. Then they were in each other's arms. Felix felt Marna's warm body trembling against his. Her head was resting on his chest, her hair a finely-woven fabric of mist in his face.

All the longings and desires of a man for the girl he loves rose into his throat and choked him. Marna did not—could not—fully realize the desperateness of their position. She had never seen a man go on the operating table and come off completely blank as to his past and identity—irreparably so. She had not seen such a person carefully taught in such a way that a complete new personality and mind were built up, made to order. It was done legally on Venus to criminals and to people who developed functional forms of insanity.

The sound of the bolt on the compartment door being slid back heralded the entrance of the brown man. He ordered them out, then followed them to the exit hatch of the ship.

Underneath the ship several Earth humans were waiting silently. Apparently following orders, they kept in a compact circle around Marna and Felix while the brown man led the way to a small concrete building set into the side of the hill.

This proved to be the entrance to a large series of halls and rooms built into the hill.

Marna was shoved through a door-

way and the door slammed behind her, while Felix was rushed along the corridor to another room. His heart sunk. He had hoped that they would be together until the worst happened. Now even that hope was shattered.

THE ROOM into which Felix was shoved offered no hope of escape. Its walls, ceiling, and floor were of solid concrete, and the door was solid, its hinges set into the wall and its lock not accessible from the inside.

The only hope of escape lay in contacting the pursuing ships and describing the surface conditions so that they could recognize them if they saw them. He wasted no time. After the first cursory examination of his cell, Felix lay down on the cot that rested against one wall and closed his eyes.

Difficult as it was, he managed to hold contact with the telepaths on the mother ship out near the moon and describe in detail the farmhouse, barn, buildings, and surrounding scenery. On the ship these descriptions were transformed into drawings by artists, and the drawings sent by television to the hovering shuttle hosts which were staying in the upper stratosphere.

Felix didn't break contact until he had heard the order given. When he finally opened his eyes he knew that the shuttle hosts were dropping down from the upper stratosphere and scattering. They would fly over every square inch of the United States and Canada, searching, searching, searching.

He realized what that would mean. Inevitably the ships would be seen. Their description would tally with no known ship. It was certain that the government would realize that these ships were not of the Earth.

Shaped like a disk with a bulging center, their silver surface changed to golden under the forces of acceleration. Each was piloted by a skilled man. They could outmaneuver any airship of Earth, unloose drive forces that would make them seem to vanish into thin air under the very eyes of observers. They could land and take off in seconds.

The age-long secrecy was being imperiled—not so much to rescue him and Marna, but to capture the brown man.

Several days passed. Felix was left to himself. Food was passed into his cell through a sliding section in the door near the floor. There was a toilet, washbowl, and shower in one corner of his room.

He kept in touch with the progress of the search through telepathic contact with other Venusians on Earth, since it was too difficult to contact the mother ship except in emergency.

The first report of a flying saucer filled them all with alarm. When it was verified by others, and then some of them were seen by the pilot, co-pilot, and stewardess of an airliner, it was certain that secrecy was at an end.

The opinion of most of the Venusians on Earth swung to taking the government of the United States into their confidence. Then an unbelievable trend began. In spite of the evidence, the newspapers were treating the whole thing lightly.

Franksters came to life and created local incidents with "flying" rotary saw blades, tinfoil kites, and just plain lies. It was conveniently forgotten that unimpeachable witnesses had seen the flying saucers. Army personnel who had seen them were reprimanded by the government for talking.

Naturally the result was that peo-

ple who saw them began to keep quiet. Because such people kept quiet rather than face ridicule the papers soon began to say, "See? They were an illusion. Why doesn't someone see them now?"

A WHOLE month passed without Felix seeing a single human being. At first he had awakened each morning with the fear that before the day was over he would be taken to an operating room and, to all effects and purposes, meet his death, since that was what the operation to produce amnesia amounted to.

As the days went by, however, his constant fear and worry dulled. At times he would almost have welcomed mental oblivion in place of the eternal waiting.

He thought of all the stories he had read of escape from impossible situations. He repeatedly surveyed his stock of materials in search of something that might make escape possible.

He tortured himself with thoughts of Marna expecting him with Venusian superchances to effect an escape and rescue her. He pictured her in horrible straits, her mind gone, turned into a robot creature.

And once he pounded futilely on the steel surface of the cell door, screaming a challenge to the brown man to come and kill him. If he was heard, no one paid the slightest attention to his outburst. Except for his meals, shoved through the slot regularly, he might have been forgotten.

* * *

Marna poked herself up from the floor where she had fallen and turned to see the door closing. Felix being led away. She ran to the door as it slammed shut and the bolt on the outside slid into place.

Then she looked around at her prison. In one corner was a toilet, washbowl, and shower. Against one wall was a cot. In the center of the ceiling was a light. Other than these there was only the solidness of concrete, broken by the even more solid appearing steel of the door. Above the door was a heavy grill-work of steel bars and vents which provided ventilation.

She sat on the edge of the cot and talked herself into being calm. She tried to think. It was all so confusing. In a few short weeks she had lost her father and mother. The murderer was the brown man, either in fact or by proxy. That much she knew.

In addition there was Felix, whom she loved. And Felix was a member of a race from Venus. She had always thought him just the son of a wealthy doctor. In college he excelled in sports, went through classes with ease, and wore clothes gracefully. She had first been attracted to him by his keen insight into human nature. At parties and in school he earned the respect and friendship of everyone.

There was a quiet dignity and reserve about him that hinted at hidden powers. There was a modesty and sincerity about him that appealed to her.

If anyone were capable of escaping the present situation, Felix could. But could even he? That question bothered her.

Her thoughts turned to the brown man. She marveled at the fact that she did not fear him. He had killed her parents. He was ruthless, power mad. In addition he was insane; perhaps not in the ordinary way, and perhaps each personality in his brain was sane by itself, but she realized that by her standard he was insane.

Yet she could see that by his own standards he was sane and perhaps superior to the ordinary mortal with one personality. He would have a loyalty to race just as she did. Undoubtedly if he succeeded in licking the whole world and defeating Venus he would set his own race free to rule what he had conquered.

That was perhaps his dream, and he would try to fulfill it at all costs.

In spite of the fact that he was not like other men, he was probably human. Vaguely she wondered if all the personalities of a brown man fell in love with the girl he married. Multiple personality made for humorous situations there. Would the various personalities struggle with one another for the privilege of kissing their lover? What would happen if one personality fell in love with one girl and another fell in love with a different one?

She chuckled humorously to herself as she sat on her cot.

THERE WAS a sound at the door.

It opened to reveal two men who looked like ordinary Americans. They didn't enter. One of them spoke to her.

"Omni told us to bring you to him," he said simply.

"Very well," Marna said. "You look like an American. Who are you?"

"I'm not an American," the man replied. There was a note of pride in his voice. "I'm one of the robots. Omni made us. I'm number nine."

"But you look like a human being!"

"Omni made us," he said. "I'm two months old. There were fourteen of us made at the same time."

The explanation dawned on Marna. The brown man kidnapped the fourteen men and operated on them, de-

stroying their memory. Then he told them they were robots and they believed him. If they had any ability to reason the facts confirmed rather than refuted Omar's statement because they all had blank minds, so far as the past was concerned.

Speechless with amazement she followed the two men down the corridor. Soon she would be one of them. She would wake up with a blank mind and be told she had been "made" by the brown man. She would believe it and be loyal to him, just as these men were. Perhaps she would kill for him if he told her to! One of the men walked ahead of her and the other followed behind. Either of them would be able to keep her from escaping.

The one ahead of her stopped at a steel door and opened it, then stepped to one side. Beyond the door was a large room luxuriously furnished. The brown man was rising from a table upon which exquisite dishes and glistening silverware lay on a white cloth.

He advanced, hands outstretched in a gesture of whole-hearted welcome.

"Ah, my dear Marna," he said warmly. "Welcome to my humble table. I must apologize for my treatment of you up to now; but I intend to make up for it."

He took her arm, a perfect host, and led her to the chair opposite the one where he had been seated. She could feel the strength of his presence like a force.

He seated her and then went around to his own chair.

A man dressed as a waiter came in and served soup.

Marna's first surprise was wearing off. She was doing some rapid thinking. Undoubtedly all this was because of her facetious statement that the brown man wasn't insane! He had be-

lieved that statement to be sincere!

She decided abruptly that this was probably a real break. If she could gain his confidence she might be able to escape and find Felix. Smiling, she looked across the table and said,

"This is certainly unexpected. May I consider myself flattered?"

"Not exactly," Omar said, returning her smile. "We've been talking you over among ourselves—me and the other personalities in my makeup; and we have decided that you are a very sensible girl. It would take a very sensible person to realize that we aren't insane, regardless of the standards of the majority race. Being practical, I decided to try to win you over to my side. I might add that we aren't unanimous on this."

Marna tasted the soup. She became aware that she was hungry. Carefully she kept her face expressionless while Omar talked. The soup helped. She could keep her eyes on the spoon.

"You must understand," Omar was saying, "that the mental standards of Earth also class me and all my race as insane. If I were to come out in the open and appeal to humanity here to rescue my people from perpetual imprisonment I probably wouldn't be believed. I would almost certainly be put in an asylum someplace. What I must do is create a force with ships and rescue my race by myself. To do that I must have help. I can get most of it by producing armadas in a large number of men and teaching them to help me. The trouble with that is that none of them have the mature judgment that was taken from them by destroying their memories of past experience. They are all right in routine tasks, but I need leaders.

"There is no hope of winning Felix over, and turning traitor to his race. But his race is not your race. All we of the brown race of Varna want is

freedom. All humanity has the right to freedom. If you will join me willingly I can assure you that Felix will not be harmed. When this is over you can have him back if you still want him."

"What of the members of my own race?" Marna asked quickly. "Felix tells me that the operation for amnesia cannot be undone."

"So far," Omni said, "I have been as humane as I could under the circumstances. Every man who has gone through the operation was a confirmed criminal. He was a menace to society the way he was."

"What of those men in the detective agency?" Marna asked. She didn't mention her parents. She feared that if Omni knew her connection with them he wouldn't dare trust her.

Omni put a look of genuine sorrow on his face.

"What of my own people?" he asked pleadingly. "The white race of Venus is a formidable enemy. We of the brown race are born into captivity and never have a chance. We live in cages, we are not allowed expression or outlet for our mental growth. We are kept from scientific learning, only know how to read and write when we teach ourselves, and the fruits of our labor are exploited by the white race."

Marna knew this was her cue. She put a look of pity on her face.

"What an injustice!" she exclaimed. "Why you are just a slave race when you should be treated by the white race as equals."

"Then you will join me?" Omni asked quickly.

"I—I'll have to think it over," Marna hesitated.

crime with no one to know her real motives. She instinctively knew that Omni was in all probability the sanest member of his race. Undoubtedly the number of completely insane brown men was so great that it would be criminal to help them get the upper hand and free themselves. Assuming it would never go that far, she would still be partner in making robots out of many of her own race. But they would be made into robots anyway, and if she refused it might be the only chance to bring an end to this fantastic situation.

She wished fervently that she could talk with Felix and explain to him that she had to agree. It was the only way. If the ships from space that had pursued them found the hideout and captured Omni, she would appear to have gone into the enemy camp. That was what worried her most. But on the other hand, if rescue came, by being in the confidence of the enemy she might be able to help in the rescue and the capture of Omni.

The waiter cleared the table and brought coffee. When he left Omni impatiently tapped his fingers on the table and asked,

"Well? Have you decided?"

"Yes," Marna answered, making her voice sound sincere. "I'm with you. On several conditions, however."

"Name them," Omni said, smiling.

"First," Marna said. "You are to use only criminals for your robot operation. Second, you are to kill no more people, for any reason whatever. Third, you are not to harm Felix. And since you will be the leader of your people if and when you free them from captivity, I want your word now that they will never try to wage war on Earth."

"Granted," Omni said, the smile on his face remaining unaltered.

WHILE THE rest of the meal was being eaten she hesitated. If she agreed she would be a partner in

That unruffled smile on the strange round face of the brown man sent fingers of panic into Marna's heart. He had given in too easily, she thought. It was only when she told herself that she had nothing to lose more than she would lose anyway, and everything to gain by the bargain, that she was able to quiet her fears.

In the weeks that followed Marna lived a strange existence. At night, supposedly (for she never saw the sun of sunlight), she was locked in her cell. In the morning breakfast was served to her by the perfect waiter.

Then came several hours as assistant to the brown man in his various activities. She became acquainted with most of his personalities.

There was Otan, the experimental surgeon, who assumed his dominancy of the strange brown body from nine to twelve each morning. He was shy, self effacing, and an artist of the highest genius with the tools of the surgeon. Marna drew him out slowly and found that he slept from twelve, when he finished his work in his laboratory operating room, until ten at night. Then he awakened.

When awake he could "listen in" on the thoughts of the other personalities or "shut them out" at will.

At twelve noon when Otan went to sleep he was supplanted by Orno, the musician.

Orno begrudged the time necessary to eat and always spent the meal time grumbling to himself and talking over various things with himself. He delighted in his own voice, experimenting with various inflections of voice—often playing records of other voices and learning to imitate them while he ate.

WITH THE meal over he went to the music room where he played on the electric organ or the violin. It

was only then that he would pay the slightest attention to Marna.

He seemed to have developed music into a strange, perfect language. He would order Marna to sit where he could watch her. Then his eyes would remain in unblinking intensity on her figure while his fingers moved over the keys of the organ.

He never talked to her except to order her to sit someplace, or stand and remain motionless. She knew that to him she was nothing more than an object to interpret into music. Often he would wave her aside and "interpret" a vase of flowers, or any other object that suited him. Once, in a terrible mood, he took a partly-dissected body of a dog from Otan's laboratory and laid it on a piece of newspaper near the organ. The music began with a beautiful, slow melody of almost childish simplicity. Gradually accompanying melodies crept in which subtly altered the atmosphere of the music, until, in a furious crescendo of movement which lasted for ten minutes the music became hellish beyond the limits of belief. It left Marna shaking and ill. Then Orno laughed; a satiric, insane chuckle as terrible as the mood of his music.

Apparently relenting from his mood, he then played something of soft beauty that made her forget the other.

It was seldom he gave up his dominancy of the body willingly. At two o'clock he would glance worriedly at his wristwatch and then the struggle would begin. It was usually Orni who overthrew him, and then relinquished control in favor of Grohm.

Grohm was the artist. He was painting a picture of life among the brown people of Venus for Marna's benefit. Since he was allowed only an hour each day, the picture was taking shape slowly. It was slowed even

more by Grohm's continual run of small talk. He was an inveterate gossip, confining his talk to remarks about the other members of the brown man's complex.

It was from Grohm that Marna found out that Orno seldom slept, and then only fitfully. He was always getting some idea about a new melody or passage, and wanting to take over the body and experiment with his new idea at once.

Grohm himself seldom slept. When not in control of the body, he attached himself unobtrusively to the visual centers and quietly analyzed and fed his soul on the incoming visual sensations.

At three Ommi took over for the rest of the afternoon, not relinquishing the body until shortly after nine, after Marna had retired for the evening.

She had learned from Grohm that after nine in the evening Porm took over. Porm was the scientist and mechanic. He was being allowed eight full hours or more a day at present while he analyzed and blue-printed the shuttle boat.

When he retired, the body was allowed to rest for an hour or two. During the time the body rested, the entire complex of the mind was awake, discussing, planning, and weighing over the differences that always existed between and among the various personalities in it.

There were other personalities with whom Marna never had any contact of any kind. There was Bobo, who served as scapegoat for the rest. Grohm had told her that Bobo was the one who was forced into dominance when anything painful to the body came up. The others delighted in his suffering.

They delighted in it now, because it seemed that Bobo was in love with

Marna. By denying him expression, they tortured him.

Thus the days passed by. Marna was fascinated by her study of the incredible brown men. She had a word to describe the strange mind of so many distinct personalities: controlled madness.

She tried to imagine an entire race of such creatures. It was when she imagined them in a position to rule the destinies of both planets, Earth and Venus, that she realized with grim certainty the task that lay before her.

AFTER THE first few days she realized that escape would be impossible. At all times she was guarded by two robots who, with the singleness of purpose of simple minds, had only one duty in life—to keep near her when she was not locked up and prevent her from going anywhere she was not allowed.

Marna wanted to know where Felix was. She surmised that it must be in one of the rooms along the same corridor where her cell was located. She decided to try a simple plan. On the second evening as she was returning to her quarters she tapped on each door as she passed it, one light tap at each door. She interspersed a few raps along the corridor wall as well, keeping an absentminded look on her face.

The two robot guards looked at her doubtfully as if they suspected something, then paid no more attention to it.

It was four nights later that she heard a faint rap in reply from one of the doors. That must be the room Felix was in!

Just to know where he was was a comfort.

The doors didn't have locks on them, just sliding bolts. It would be

simple to slide the bolt back and shove the door open some evening. However, that would be something that would have to wait until there was a plan of escape.

Where was the weakness in this entire situation? That was the question uppermost in her mind. She must find that weakness.

As she grew more acquainted with the various personalities of the brown man she became convinced that the weakness would not be found there. Control of the body was granted on a rather democratic method. No single personality could retain control effectively without the consent of the majority.

Was it in the robot guards that followed her everywhere that she would find the weakness? They never replied to anything she said to them. They seemed to have orders not to be friendly with her. Yet there was a possibility that secretly they liked her. Working on that possibility she began to talk to them as though they were her friends.

Never by any slightest change of expression did they give away to their inward reaction to her continued attempt at friendship. Yet she persisted. She did not see how smiles and friendly chatter could possibly be resisted in the long run.

If, in the privacy of her prison room she often cried herself to sleep, or lay sleepless, grieving for her mother and father, in the morning she invariably appeared as if she had slept undisturbed.

Little by little she inserted her will in the daily routine. Suggestions for meals were welcomed by the brown man. It soon became her duty to plan the menu. In the surgery, Otan soon began asking her to hand him tools, sterilize the used tools and put them away. She made herself so

useful to him that in two weeks he decided to get along without the robot who had been serving him. Marna had grown so familiar with his techniques and habits that she could anticipate his needs.

THEN ONE morning her guards took her along a different route. It was the first variation in the daily routine. When she was escorted into a large operating room where she had never been before her heart filled with panic.

This was not a room for dissecting dogs and cats and other animals. This was a complete surgery for operating on people!

The brown man was there waiting for her. Otan greeted her and smiled at her from the brown man's eyes. There was an air of eagerness about him that told her "be worst. Today there would be an operation on a human being, and it would undoubtedly be the operation that destroyed the memory, leaving the patient in a state of amnesia.

Would it be Felix? She could not hide her anxiety. Otan saw it and recognized it for what it was.

"No," he said, "it isn't Felix. Our word is good. We have a new band of 'recruits'. I hope you will be able to perform your duties as my assistant this morning as usual. Of course, it will be somewhat of a strain so, if you don't feel up to it, I will carry on alone. You see, due to the little fiction we teach our recruits, we don't dare to let any of them assist in this operation or they might put two and two together and figure out that they are really human beings."

"Well, thanks," Marna said, taking a deep breath. "You are awfully kind, but I think I can go ahead with it. After all," she took a grip on her feelings and gave a smile that should

have won her an academy award, "if I am to be of any help to you I'll have to learn to take the unpleasant along with the pleasant."

"That's the spirit," Otan said, patting her affectionately on the shoulder.

Almost, she could close her eyes and believe all this to be the same world in which she had grown up. If the brown man had looked no different physically than any other man she might have come to believe so. His face was too round and smooth, his entire head too globular. His shoulders stuck out too far from his ribs.

Now, with Otan in charge in his operating clothes, the brown man almost looked Frankensteinish.

He left the room, going through double swinging doors at the far end.

Marna looked furtively around. On the instrument table near the operating table were the assorted tools that would be used. There was the surgical rotary saw with half a dozen extra blades and the small wrench. There were several scalpels, an assortment of tweezers and surgical scissors, a spool of gut thread, a tray of needles for it, and—her eyes lighted up—a new instrument she hadn't noticed before. It was like a long ice pick.

Her mind rebelled. Why had she felt that surge of hope when her eyes brought it to her? Could she kill the brown man? And if she did how would that help, since the robots obeyed only his commands?

Otan shoved through the double doors pushing a wheeled stretcher ahead of him. An unconscious figure lay on the stretcher, covered entirely by a sheet.

He wheeled the stretcher up near the operating table and lifted the figure off. Then he wheeled the

stretcher against a wall and returned to the operating table.

Next he lifted the sheet back from the victim's face. The revealed face was that of a handsome man of perhaps thirty.

"He's under a mild drug that is compatible with ether," Otan explained. "Just released from the penitentiary a couple of weeks ago after serving four years for manslaughter. This will be a service to humanity; he was ready to do anything to get money. Sooner or later he would have killed someone. This way he becomes a useful member of society—our society."

He shoved a tube into the man's throat with an expert twist, then connected a hose to it. The hose ran to a white enamel box. A needle on a meter attached to the box began to fluctuate.

Then Otan manipulated two valves until the fluctuations of the needle slowed down. His eyes brooded on the needle for a minute or two, then he slapped the face of the unconscious man. The rhythm of the needle didn't show the slightest variation.

With a satisfied grunt Otan lifted the man's head and placed a shaped block under it so that the entire top of the head was accessible. Next he took a pair of scissors and trimmed the hair close to the scalp on a large spot directly on top. Next he took a scalpel and shaved the spot carefully.

Ten minutes later the spot had been thoroughly cleaned and walled in from the surrounding scalp so that no whisp of hair could interfere with the work.

"Short blade," Otan said absently.

Marna handed him the shortest scalpel silently. Her heart was beating like a trip hammer. She felt as if it would burst through her ribs.

Otan took the instrument and bent over the prostrate figure. The knife sank into the white skin until it reached the skull. His fingers drew it carefully along. It ran swiftly, well ahead of the blood that began to seep from the thin cut.

"Now!" Marna's brain screamed at her. "Now! Now before it is too late!"

Otan's back was to her, his eyes intent on his work. Her hand crept toward the needle-sharp probe, drew back in panic.

She wasn't breathing now. In another second Otan would straighten up and turn to get the surgical saw. Already he had completed the cut and was peeling back the flesh to expose the bone structure. In half a second he would turn and see her face.

She couldn't hope to hide the tell-tale evidence on her features. He would see what she intended doing.

"NOW!" her whole being screamed at her.

Then she was standing back, several feet from where she had been. She had no memory of having moved back. Almost incomprehendingly she saw the prone figure of the brown man, the silver glint of the long probe sticking through the whiteness of his coat in the middle of the back.

He wasn't moving. He must have died before he hit the floor. She must have done it, but she couldn't remember doing it.

He lay there, his silent back accusing, the scalpel with its glistening pink wetness a scant inch from his slender out-stretched fingers where it had fallen.

Marna's attention was drawn back to the unconscious patient. Blood was seeping into the hair around the wound. She must do something.

Stepping over the dead brown

man she took gauze and sopped up the blood, then hastily laid the flesh back over the exposed bone surface. She felt a moment of panic when she remembered the sulfa powder. Lifting back the strip of flesh she sprinkled the powder carefully, then laid the flesh in place again.

The job of sewing stretched on into eternity. She found herself worrying about the time. At twelve o'clock Orno would come and catch her.

Then she remembered that Orno wasn't a person, but just one of the personalities of the brown man. She laughed and cried at the same time. She had killed them all. Otan, Orno, Grohen, Orni, the mad leader of the group, and even poor Boho whom she had never seen. All of them. She had killed them!

NOW IT was done. The wound was sewed up and bandaged. There was nothing more she could do.

She pulled the rubber tube from the black mouth insert. Then she wondered if she should pull out the insert. She remembered long ago when she had seen a girl friend of hers come back from the operating room. The insert had been left in her mouth until just before she regained consciousness.

Panic had come in another way. Maybe she should have left the tube on and shut off the ether spray valve. Then she could watch the respiration recorder to see when consciousness was near.

Maybe she should run and free Felix. He would know what to do. But the robots would discover that their master was dead. No; she had to wait. The man on the operating table would have to be her ally. He must regain consciousness and she

must explain to him. Even though he was a killer he was human.

After a while the unconscious man on the table began to make choking sounds.

She pulled on the throat insect until it came out. The man spluttered and coughed violently. Then he opened his eyes. They were blue.

Blue! Somehow that seemed intensely important to Marna.

They closed, and he shook his head slowly. His hand came up and felt of his head, felt of the bandage and explored its boundaries.

Then he opened his eyes again and looked at her questioningly.

"How do you feel?" Marna asked slowly.

She wanted him to talk. Oh God, how she wanted to hear his voice!

He smiled. His smile was bitter, tired.

"All right, I guess," he said. He didn't ask any questions. He had just said, "All right, I guess."

But he kept his eyes open, looking at her. They held an admiring light. They looked her over, pausing at the places that were worth pausing at. Felix had never done that.

Why had that crept into her mind? She knew. It was the reaction to the past few weeks. This man was of her own race even if he were a killer who had just been released from the penitentiary. He was human in the real sense of the word. But so was Felix. And she loved Felix, so this was just a reaction and she would get over it.

Haltingly she began to explain to the man why he had been on the operating table and how she had killed the brown man. When she told about that he sat up and looked down at the stiffening figure on the floor.

His eyes widened in amazement as

he saw the grotesque figure for the first time.

He tried to whistle, wet his lips with his tongue and substituted an ineffective "Well!" for the whistle.

Marna saw his face begin to turn a light shade of green. She picked up a dish designed for the purpose and placed it under his chin just in time.

Afterwards she found a towel and soaked it in cold water under the faucet and wiped his face. His hair was black. There was a stubble of black beard short enough to indicate he had shaved only ten or twelve hours before.

His teeth were even and white when he smiled his thanks briefly. Then he shoved the towel gently aside and dropped his feet over the edge of the operating table.

He sat there tentatively for a moment, then took a firm grip on the edge and slid his feet to the floor, hanging on. When he let go he was able to stand, although his legs were unsteady.

After a few steps he turned and went back to the operating table. Then he tried it again.

Soon he was sure he would be all right.

Marna stood well away from him, her eyes wide, watching him. When he was sure he would be able to stand and walk he looked at her again, a dry smile creasing his face.

THEN HE bent down and turned the body of the brown man over. He did it by crowding one arm of the prone figure against the side and lifting up on the opposite shoulder. It didn't seem to take much effort, even though the brown man weighed over two hundred.

He looked at the dark brown ball of a head with the features seemingly

painted on, and whistled: this time without trouble.

"Now I believe you," he said in an awed tone of voice. "Let's get out of here, ba-, say, what is your name?"

"Marna," she answered.

"Mine's Dave," he said. "Dave Jones. And don't call me Davy. How do we get out of here?"

"That's the problem," Marna said. She went on to explain about the robots; how they were convinced they were not human, and would fight in all probability.

Dave's eyes wandered over the operating room while she talked. When she finished explaining he nodded his head toward the double doors. "Where's that lead to?"

"I don't know," Marna replied. "Otan brought you in from there. He also said that he didn't dare let the robots know about you or they might figure out that they weren't robots."

A startled look appeared on her face.

"He also said there was a batch. That would mean that there are others in there asleep under the influence of the drug he gave you."

"That's right," Dave said, nodding grimly. "There were seven of us."

He looked down at the brown man once more and then lifted his eyes to Marna. There was sympathy in his calm blue eyes, and that was all that was needed to make her lose her grip on herself.

Tears came to her eyes and she felt her lips begin to tremble.

"Easy there, sweetheart," Dave said. "We've got work to do. Save it till later, huh?"

He tapped her gently on the chin. Then he grinned and walked over to the double doors.

His grin was just like a little boy's.

Marna watched his retreating back with a new light in her eyes.

Dave shoved open one of the doors and then looked back at her.

"Yeah," he said. "Look at this."

On the other side of the door were six unconscious men, stretched out side by side.

"How we gonna wake them up?" Dave asked.

"I don't know," Marna began. "Wait! Otan shot some kind of injection into your arm after he gave you ether. Maybe that was the antidote for the drug."

She went back to the instrument table and picked up a hypodermic needle. It held ten cc's, but the plunger was down to the nine cc mark.

"I'm sure this must be it," Marna said. "He just shoved the needle into your neck."

Dave felt the side of his neck and found the spot.

"That's a little dangerous," he suggested. "Would the stuff work if you shoved the needle in the arm?"

"Maybe we'd better try it," Marna suggested doubtfully.

DAVE looked at her and then bent down, rolling back the sleeve of the first man.

"I wish I knew something about these guys," he said worriedly.

"Don't you know who they are?" Marna asked.

He shook his head.

"I don't see any harm in telling you," he said. "There's been too many parolees disappearing lately within a week or two after they were released from prison. It's been centering around Chicago. The F. B. I. decided to find out about it, so they had me 'released' from prison. The man whose name I used is actually in a state penitentiary. He doesn't know that the papers announced his re-

lease. I assumed his identity in the hopes that I could uncover what is happening to all those missing men."

He looked back into the operating room at the figure of the dead Venusian brown man and shuddered.

"If I understood you correctly, I owe my life to you, Marna." He grinned. "My mental life, that is."

"Then you aren't a murderer?" Marna exclaimed.

One of the men on the floor groaned and opened his eyes. He looked up at the two standing over him. Then recognition came over him.

"Gee, Slip," he said. "What t'ell we got into?"

"You know me?" Dave asked.

"Sure Slip," the man exclaimed. "We were cell buddies for a year over a year ago. Remember? Butch Wilson?"

"Sure I remember now," Dave lied, a note of relief in his voice. "How do you feel?"

"Okay," the man answered. He sat up to prove it. His eyes took in the other figures and saw that they were all beginning to stir. Then they swung toward the operating room and took in the figure of the brown man on the floor and the signs that indicated an operating room.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"Help me with the rest," Dave said. "Then I'll tell you all what it's about."

"Sure, Slip," Butch Wilson said. "Say, what's the matter with you? You still don't act like you know me."

"It's the operation," Marna hastened to explain, pointing to the bandage on the top of Dave's head. "The brown man started to operate, but didn't get a chance to finish it. Otherwise Slip wouldn't even remember who he is."

"Oh, . . ." Butch said.

HALF AN hour later the seven men, including Dave, were sufficiently recovered from the effects of the drug to be ready for trouble.

"Now lets get this straight," Dave said. "When we go out of here we have to fight a bunch of guys who think they are machines instead of human beings. Maybe they'll be tough to handle. If they aren't, don't mess them up too much because, except for Marna, we would be the new recruits and lap up all that same stuff about being machines and believe it. If you see somebody you know among them, forget about knowing them because they've lost their memory completely and won't know you from Adam. The only way out of this place is through that door. When Marna opens it, we go out and stay in a compact group around the door until she locks it."

"We got it," Butch said. "Let's get it over with."

"And you stay in here until we come back," Dave said to Marna. He grinned at her crookedly. "Be seeing you, sweetheart."

Butch pulled back the bolt on the door and opened it. Marna saw her two guards standing there. Then Butch had each of them by the shirt front.

"Are we gonna have trouble with you guys?" he asked. That was his mistake.

There was a blur of motion and two fists connected simultaneously with either side of Butch's jaw. As he dropped, the others rushed to take his place. By sheer numbers they overcame the two guards.

The action had taken place in the doorway so that Marna had no room to close the door. Now, with three of their own number unconscious and the two guards still struggling,

Dave ordered them back into the operating room.

When they had dragged the last of the casualties through the door, he closed and bolted it with a sigh of relief.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "It's a good thing there wasn't another one of those robots. We would have been licked before we started."

Marna went to a shelf and brought some adhesive tape. The two guards were quickly bound. Meanwhile the three men who had been knocked out recovered.

"Man, oh man!" Butch exclaimed, rubbing his jaw tenderly. "I feel like I got caught between two box-cars."

He looked at the two trussed guards.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "I know one of those guys. The light-haired boy is Harry McGurk. He was boxing in Chicago a couple years ago. I heard he signed up for a circuit in South America at five hundred a week."

He looked blank for a second, then a light dawned.

"Say," he said. "That's what they promised me on this job. Five hundred a week."

He got to his feet and walked over to the blond guard.

"Harry," he said. "Don't you remember me?"

"I'm not Harry," the guard said calmly. "I'm a robot. I was manufactured fourteen months ago and have been trained in fighting."

"Well, whataya know," Butch said pityingly. "Guess I was mistaken, pal." He turned to the others with a sick look in his eyes. "What do we do now?" he asked. "Stick our jaw out some more?"

"We'll have to," Dave replied. "How many of these robots are there, Marna?"

"I don't know, S&P," she replied. "These are the only two I've ever seen in here. When I was brought here there were several more outside, but they didn't come in."

"Well, let's try it again," Dave said. "But this time we'll stick together. Two of these robots are almost a match for the seven of us."

The door opened again. There was no one in sight.

"Be ready to open the door in a hurry if one of us yells and knocks," Butch said anxiously. "We might run into three of these machines."

Marna watched them go along the corridor until they disappeared around a corner. Then she locked the door. Suddenly she remembered the waiter; that she had forgotten him in the excitement of the moment. She opened the door again, then changed her mind and closed it. If they ran into him he was just one against seven. If there were more and she called, it might arouse them all at once.

* * *

DAVE LED the way along the corridor. They hadn't gone far when a man dressed like a waiter stepped out of a door.

"You are the new robots?" he asked. Then, without waiting for a reply, "This way, please. You will want something to eat before beginning your training."

He turned his back and re-entered the room.

Dave looked at the others and winked. Silently they followed the waiter into a typical mess hall. A long table was set, with bowls of steaming food in its center.

Without hesitation Dave sat down and started to load up his plate. The others cautiously followed his example. They discovered they were hungry, and as the waiter went about



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his duties without seeming to realize anything was amiss, they began to enjoy the situation.

When they had finished Dave gave a nod in the direction of the waiter. They silently surrounded him and took him by the arms. He didn't struggle. He didn't even seem curious.

They led him through the back door of the mess hall into a kitchen. No one else was there. Then, still holding him, they went back through the mess hall and down the corridor to the nearest door. It was bolted.

No one was inside, so they pushed the waiter through the door and closed and bolted it again.

The next door opened into a similar room. This one had an occupant. On the cot was a young man with very long legs in proportion to the length of his body.

"This must be Felix," Dave said.

His eyes were closed. Dave shook him gently, but he didn't awaken.

"We can rescue him later," Butch whispered.

Felix's eyes opened.

"Did you say rescue?" he asked.

They gave him a brief summary of what had happened.

With the addition to their party, they went down the corridor with more boldness, opening doors as they came to them.

Finally they came to the door opening onto the outside. It opened into the small concrete house set into the hill. They could see through the windows of the place.

"Looks like there are no more of the robots down here, anyway," Butch observed.

"Good," Felix said. "Now I can contact my headquarters in Chicago and get someone out here to take care of things."

"Just a minute," Dave objected. "I

think we ought to contact the government on this."

"Are you really from Venus?" Butch cut in.

"Venus?" Felix echoed, alarm in his voice. "So Marna told you?"

"Yes," Dave said. "She told us everything."

"Then surely you must understand that we have to keep this secret," Felix said. "We'll call Chicago and they'll take care of everything. You men will be amply rewarded for your secrecy. In fact, I can promise that you will never lack for money for the rest of your lives."

The others looked at Dave. They seemed to have accepted him as their leader.

"How about it, Skip?" Butch asked.

"Hmmm," Dave objected. "From what I've seen around here, that kind of an offer smells like more operations to make robots out of us. We're just a bunch of crooks, so far as you're concerned, Felix. You're a nice guy, but you don't dare let us go, once you have the upper hand. When you get your friends here, you might sing another song."

"Yeah," Butch said, licking his lips nervously. "I never thought of that. I don't want to be made into a machine."

Felix looked around at the men. They were staring at him wide-eyed.

"Take me to Marna," Felix demanded. "She'll tell you that won't happen. If she told you the whole thing you must know that the brown race of Venus is hereditarily insane. This is the only one that ever got away from Venus. It won't happen again. And if you tell the United States government, they'll build ships like the one out in that barn you saw. They'll go to Venus. It will lead to interplanetary war."

"Gee! We're important!" Butch

is much more than that. The spacing of the wires is quite exact, set at a predetermined distance. This is to match (suit) the transmission line to both the antenna and the TV receiver. By matching, we mean that the electrical quality called the impedance of all three are equal.

There is a good reason for this. The radio-man will take a small electric light bulb attached to a little loop of wire, or he will take a fluorescent bulb and bring it all along the length of the transmission line of course.

If everything is suitably arranged, nothing will happen, but if the electrical characteristics of the swimmers, the line and the readers are not perfect, the bulb will periodically light up at points along the line. This interesting phenomenon indicates the presence of what are called "standing waves."

Standing waves are just that; they are fixed distributions of voltage and current along a wire carrying high frequency currents, and they are due to the reflection of current waves from discontinuities in the line.

All that this means in practical terms, is that the TV receiver is not receiving the maximum amount of energy that it should if standing waves are present. The only way in which this can be overcome is to eliminate those standing waves.

If you have a TV receiver you yourself can determine where these undesirable standing waves exist. Purchase a beam of or a new fluorescent bulb—it makes no difference—and run it along the TV lead-in. If the bulb lights here and there, you have standing waves, for what is happening is simply that the high voltage along the transmission line is exciting the gas within the fluorescent bulb into luminescence.

It is marvelous to see no electrical connections—yet the bulb may light brilliantly. This may fail with many TV receivers because they are designed to operate from very minute input voltages. Yet standing waves can be detected with sensitive meters. They're one more problem for the engineer to solve.

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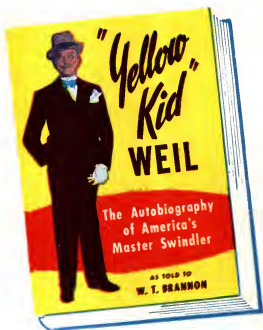
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